Author's note

In publishing this first part of the fourth and final volume, we feel compelled to give readers a brief explanation, which is in no way ritualistic or self-justifying, but which we believe may be useful in understanding the "slant" of our presentation. That said, let it be clear that we do not wish to offer them an interpretation (since it is our belief that readers should, on the one hand, not be hidden anything, and on the other, not be influenced but, on the contrary, to provide them with the elements to form their own opinion, their own judgment), but rather to highlight the reasons for an "angle" that in some parts of the volume, and especially in the last chapter, may give the impression of weighing down the reconstruction with details and even repetitions that are apparently unnecessary. Although dealing with a shorter period than the previous volumes, a shorter period, this volume sees the light of day at a greater distance from the previous one than any of the others and is considerably larger than any of the others. The two things are closely connected and, indirectly, suggest that of all the volumes published so far, this is the one that presented the greatest difficulties for the authorthe author. Despite the gaps in the documentation that needed to be filled; despite the constraints of a predominantly ideological (and often openly and aggressively political) culture that ignores a series of aspects and problems, sometimes because they are foreign to its own schemes and myths, but more often so as not to question the picture all in black and white, accredited by it to our national history since unification, and so as not to have to deal with the outcomes of 'ambiguous' cultural atmospheres and 'restless' collective moods or, worse, with a series of common aspects and equivalences between regimes which, despite their diversity, had their raison d'être in the rejection and 'overcoming' of the liberal-democratic system; despite all this, Il rivoluzionario, Il fascista and Il duce were placed in a sort of 'terra cognita', on which there was much work to be done, deepening, revising, in some cases even overturning what had been acquired up to that point, but which had already been explored and tilled to some extent by a series of specific studies, comprehensive syntheses, comparative analyses that had sometimes pointed to important new lines of research and provided suggestions for a more historically accurate reconstruction, less influenced by ideological and political concerns and taboos. The ally, on the other hand, is largely (with the partial exception of the reconstruction of purely military events relating to the Army) in a sort of "terra incognita", in which there are areas that, as in ancient maps, could be marked with the words 'hic sunt leones'. The period covered has, in fact, remained almost entirely the preserve of essentially political and/or self-reproducing journalismself-reproducing in forms that are often culturally degraded. This is despite the fact that a series of studies in related fields dedicated to aspects and personalities of literature and the visual arts have provided glimpses of a reality and raised issues that deserve to be examined from the perspective of the political, social, and cultural history of those years in the broadest sense. Nor is this surprising, , on closer inspection, come as a surprise. First of all, because it is the historian's task to acquire new knowledge through original research and to compose it into a coherent interpretative framework, which others will then synthesize and disseminate in forms that satisfy the general public's desire for information and curiosity. In the absence of original studies, the period of the Second World War has remained almost entirely the preserve of a sort of "historical

journalism' not unlike the 'philosophical journalism' rightly denounced by Paolo Rossi as the main cause of the mediocrity of Italian culture today. Secondly, because Italian contemporary history, and in particular studies on the Second World War period, have been and still are largely burdened by a) the difficulty and sometimes impossibility of accessing all public sources and even more so private ones (numerous and in some cases very important); b) the hegemony established in the first thirty years after liberation by the Communist Party over Italian culture, largely thanks to a very precise schematization of history in general and of Italian history after the French Revolution in particular, and the influence it has exerted on the mindset of large sections of non-Communist Italians (a discussion that should also be had in order to truly understand the character not only of most historical journalism and textbooks, but also of certain Catholic and even liberal-democratic historiography). A hegemony which, contrary to what happened in other countries (especially France) and is happening in the Soviet Union, has not only come through the events that overwhelmed "real socialism" and its ideology, and therefore its historiographical vulgate, virtually unscathed, but has even become more aggressive, as it remains the only tool that a "new" left can now use to try to justify and relaunch its political raison d'être. Eloquent in this regard are the indiscriminate accusations of 'removal', 'relativization' and even 'rehabilitation' and the demonization (all emotionally played out in the form of an arbitrary extension to other fields and research problems of the indignation and concerns rightly aroused by Faurisson's theses) of all sorts of 'historical revisionism' not promoted and duly channeled by the heirs and followers of the authors of the vulgate, who, now with their backs against the wall due to the obvious inconsistency and sometimes falsity of that vulgate, claim today that they want to 'revise' it. The consequences for culture, freedom of research, the progress of historical studies and, in this case, for those on the period of the Second World War (in many ways decisive for shedding light on and truly understanding subsequent events, both internationally and in our country), is clear to anyone who wants to see. In this context, it is our belief that the "slice" we have taken from this latest volume of Mussolini's biography is, despite the problems and, in some cases, the difficulties of reading it, the only one possible and correct both scientifically and with respect to readers. As mentioned above, there is an almost complete lack of good studies to refer to, sometimes even from a purely documentary and factual point of view, and faced with a mass of works, the vast majority of which are memoirs (almost always self-defensive, apologetic, or in any case biased) and more or less openly political journalism, even more than for the previous volumes, we felt it necessary to undertake a vast and as systematic as possible work of excavation and documentary reconstruction, which led us to deal with a series of general and specific issues that, at first glance, may seem irrelevant to a biographical reconstruction, but which, in our opinion, are indispensable. Only by shedding light on them, in fact, is it possible to understand the real reasons behind certain behaviors and decisions (and their maturation process) and not remain trapped in the shallows of a biographical genre that is entirely focused on and resolved in the man, that is, entirely based on personality, character, culture, the environment of the biographee and, in the best of cases, on a series of generic references to the 'social forces' with which he had to contend. All these things are important and must always be borne in mind, but they are not sufficient

on their own to truly explain the behavior and actions of any man, especially a statesman, and it is necessary to extract them from the generic, not to turn them into passe-partout formulas. As Isaiah Berlin wrote in the introduction to his Four Essays on Liberty, while it is indeed absurd to reduce everything to human factors alone (or social factors alone) and ignore the role of non-human factors (i.e., the effects "of the unexpected consequences of human actions" and "the fact that men often do not understand exactly their own individual behavior and its origins), it is equally absurd to ignore 'the motivations and context from which [human actions] arose, the range of possibilities that unfolded before the agents' eyes, most of which never came to fruition (many of which could not have come to fruition anyway)' and, again, 'the variety of human thought and imagination, the image of themselves and the world that individuals construct'. This is the only historically valid approach, as it is the only one that allows us to look beyond the surface of a statesman's behavior and instead grasp its origins, logic, and underlying reasons. We felt the need to take this approach from the moment we began working on the first volume. When we reached the period of World War II (not only the most important period of Mussolini's life, politically and personally, but also in terms of what the war meant for Italy and Italians), we also found that it was the period in which there were the most initiatives and behaviors that were apparently less understandable, but nevertheless the most sacrificed by his biographers, who, on the basis of a series of premises,Italy and Italians, but also the one in which there were the most initiatives and Mussolini's behavior was apparently the least comprehensible, but nevertheless the most sacrificed by his biographers who, on the basis of a series of general premises, ended up giving the war the value of a foregone conclusion of what had already been stated about the nature of fascism and Mussolini's personality and, therefore, to treat it only summarily). However, that need has become an unavoidable necessity, on pain of either failing to explain too many things or having to resort to those more or less openly character-based 'explanations' whose inadequacy, on the one hand, we were already fully convinced of and, on the other, we found confirmation of already at a first summary documentary check. Hence the need to broaden the discussion beyond the limits set by previous biographers of Mussolini and to explore a series of aspects of Italian reality and the war that, until now, those who have dealt with Italy's participation in World War II have either ignored or hastily dismissed on the basis of a more or less uncritically accepted vulgate that is now showing more and more flaws, or resolved in an ideological-political key.Italy's participation in World War II have either ignored or hastily dismissed on the basis of a more or less uncritically accepted vulgate that is now showing more and more flaws, or resolved in an ideological-political key, because only by having a fairly precise idea of them can we realize the "range of possibilities" that Mussolini had or believed he had (and why he believed he had them) and, therefore, truly understand his behavior. And to understand it not only in its so-called main lines—which, from a biographical point of view, means relatively little—but in its realization and, at the same time, its change over time; under the pressure of the need to adapt to the reality of the war and the country, but also of his particular state of mind, which was determined not only, and in many cases not so much, by purely character-related motivations, but also suggestions (whose roots often went back a long way), experiences, considerations, and hypotheses that cannot be ignored in either

biographical or historical terms tout court. As we have already mentioned, and as readers will easily realize, putting this dual necessity into practice first required a process of research and documentary reconstruction on a series of general and specific issues that had hitherto been ignored by Mussolini's biographers and which, in some cases, some might at first glance consider to be outside the specific theme. Then, as a direct consequence, the choice was made to adopt a different approach to the exposition than that adopted in previous volumes: on the one hand, broader and more detailed, on the other, less bound to the chronological sequence of events and aimed at highlighting what, in our opinion, are the aspects, problems, moments that are most important for understanding Mussolini's behavior. In some cases, we go back a long way in time in order to try to establish how much of his choices, whether implemented or remaining at the stage of hypothesis or mere ambition, were imposed by more or less contingent needs, i.e., by the particular moment of war, and how much (and to what extent) were the result of his old convictions. In doing so, we strive, in cases where the greater availability of published sources and studies to refer to allowed us to do so, to give our exposition a fairly concise character; in others, where this possibility did not exist or was not such as to allow an effective understanding of the events in question and in particular of their evolution over time, or where there was even a consolidated vulgate that led in a completely different direction, proceeding instead analytically, so as to enable readers to directly evaluate the process through which we arrived at certain conclusions or hypotheses. Characteristic of the latter approach is the last chapter of this volume, in which (even at the cost of considerably lengthening our exposition and not being able to avoid a series of repetitions), in order to try to penetrate as much as possible Mussolini's attitude and intentions in the last months of the regime and in the final crisis of July 24 and 25, we considered it appropriate to proceed with a detailed reconstruction of the events of those months, examining them not as a whole, but from the point of view of the individual forces (internal and external to the regime) involved, so as to better understand the peculiarities of the individual positions and their evolution. Even more than in the past, we have benefited from the collaboration of countless individuals in the preparation of this volume. We owe them various kinds of help: assistance with archival and bibliographic research in Italy and abroad, access to archives and personal and family papers, testimonies, suggestions for further research, research in specific fields that we would not have been able to carry out ourselves, processing of statistical data and their compilation in the form of tables, etc. As it is impossible to thank everyone and to avoid the risk of of not repaying our debt of gratitude to everyone, we will limit ourselves, as in the past, to mentioning only those to whom we owe the most, confident that the many others we do not mention will not hold it against us. Many of those to whom we owe the most have since passed away. It is with them that we feel we must begin: Vittorio Cini, Riccardo Del Giudice, Romano Gazzera, Dino Grandi, Maria Grazia Landi, Camillo Pellizzi, Giorgio Pini, Ugo Spirito, Clorinda Thaon di Revel, and Leonardo Vitetti. We would like to immediately follow them with the heirs Ansaldo, Baistrocchi, Bottai, Federzoni, Giuriati, Guarneri, Panunzio, Pietromarchi, Soddu, and Suster, as well as Dr. Luigi Deserti, the Honorable Giuseppe Attilio Fanelli, Ambassador Egidio Ortona, theRandolfo Pacciardi, Piero Puccioni, Don Ramon Serrano Suner, and Mario Zamboni. We would also like to express our sincere

gratitude to Professor Renato Grispo, Director General of the State Archives, Professor Piero Pastorelli, President of the Commission for the Reorganization and Publication of Italian Diplomatic Documents, General Pier Luigi Bertinaria, Head of the Historical Office of theArmy, Lieutenant Colonel Mario Cermelli of the Historical Office of the Air Force, Minister Tomaso De Vergottini, director of the Historical Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Dr. Mario Gazzini, head of the Italian Africa section of the same archive. Among the many friends who have helped us in various ways, we would like to mention and thank at least: Elena Aga Rossi, Fiorenza Fiorentino, Annunziata Nobile, Sandra Staderini, and Fabrizia Toscano, Ennio Bozzetti, Giuseppe Conti, Luigi Cucci, Valdo Ferretti, Emilio Gentile, Luigi Goglia, Lamberto Mercuri, Mario Missori, Renato Moro, Paolo Nello, Giuseppe Parlato, Luciano Zani, and Victor Zaslavsky. Like the previous volumes, this one is also dedicated to the memory of Delio Cantimori. However, we cannot fail to express our gratitude to two dear friends who have passed away in recent years, Mario Bussagli and Rosario Romeo, with whom we often discussed central and specific themes of our work and from whom we received ideas, suggestions, and confirmation that were essential to us and which heighten our sadness at not being able to see this work of ours completed and to discuss it with them. September 1990. Chapter One Mussolini, the armed forces, and the "parallel war"' In Mussolini's biography, the 'war' and, in this case, Italy's participation in World War II, not only has to be given limited space, but must also be seen in close relation to Mussolini's personality and actions. To reduce the discussion to itsthe essentials, we can say that the "war" pertains to Mussolini's biography (as it does to that of any other statesman of any belligerent country) only in those aspects that can be traced back to what influenced his actions and what his actions and, more generally, his presence determined in the conduct (in the broad sense) of the war itself. It is on these aspects, therefore, that our reconstruction and analysis will focus most, devoting to them an attention that is often not found in works conceived from the classical perspective, characteristic of studies on the participation of a given country in the Second World War. As for the other aspects, and first and foremost the military operations in the strict sense, we will limit ourselves to making only those brief references strictly necessary to place our reconstruction and analysis in the overall context of the war in general and its more specifically Italian aspect in particular. This is all the more so given that there are now works of excellent scientific quality to refer to for further information on the war in general, and even on the more specifically Italian aspect, some studies of good quality are beginning to become available. That said, in order to avoid both misunderstandings and too many interruptions in thethe fabric of our exposition in order to clarify particular aspects or problems connected with them from time to time, it is necessary to dwell immediately on two fundamental issues which, if not addressed, would make it impossible to have a serious historical discussion on Italy's participation in the Second World War and on the relationship between Mussolini and the military hierarchy. Military memoirs from the early post-war years, but also, on closer inspection, almost all subsequent historiography (and not only the more strictly technical-military ones) on Italy's participation in World War II, have been dominated by a series of clichés based, as in all clichés of truth and falsehood, on varying degrees of truth depending on the case, but lacking even the slightest effort to project them into a perspective that was

not necessarily historical, but at least broader, taking into account what had happened in other belligerent countries. The conscious or unconscious aim of most of these clichés, and certainly of those that have been most successful, has been to make Mussolini and fascism the sole scapegoats for the defeat (a defeat that was, moreover, dishonorable in many respects) and to absolve the other members of the ruling class, and first and foremost the military hierarchy, 'the armed forces', the first 'victims' of the regime, who 'in vain' tried to keep it from falling into the abyss in 1939-40 and then, again, to oppose it as much as they could. Among these clichés, the most successful and enduring has been that of Italy's absolute unpreparedness to face the conflict, so much so that it has been substantially accepted by everyone, from military memoirs to the most recent and serious historiography, to the supporters of the thesis of a military hierarchy that was largely non-fascist and exempt from real responsibility for the defeat, as well as to those who, rejecting this thesis, have fallen into the opposite excess of identifying sic et simpliciter, on the basis of a mere classist schematization, fascism and military hierarchies, uniting them in a single and equal condemnation. Hence the need to clarify, once and for all, this series of clichés, separating the true from the false and bringing the whole discussion back to a level that is no longer self-defensive, partisan, ideological, as it essentially still is, but scientific. Some of these clichés will be discussed as our discussion addresses the issues they raise. However, two of them need to be addressed immediately, both because of the importance and preliminary nature of the issues they raise, and because these issues have origins and histories that predate the period covered in this volume. One is the relationship between fascism and the armed forces and, within that, between Mussolini and the armed forces; the other is the degree of military preparedness of the armed forces and, more generally, of the Italian economy at the time of Mussolini's decision to enter the war in June 1940. The relationship between fascism and the armed forces cannot be correctly understood in terms other than that which existed between fascism and the liberal-democratic ruling class. Taken individually, military leaders can be considered nothing more than a reflection of this class, its moods, and its political and social orientations. A certain weight must certainly be attributed to social and, even more so, family background, as well as to age and the way in which they had experienced the Great War. However, there is no reason to say that, in the years around the "March on Rome" and essentially afterwards, the number of fascists among military officers was proportionally higher than that found in other socio-professional categories. At most, it can be said that initially the least fascist branch of the armed forces, due to tradition and family upbringing, greater knowledge of the reality of other countries, interpersonal and marital ties, and the admiration aroused by the 'model" of the Royal Navy, was the Navy, while subsequently the most fascist was the Air Force, both because of its character as a "new," "assault," and "daring" branch of the military, and because it was created as an autonomous branch by fascism and, moreover, largely by a man like Balbo, who, for better or worse, had what it took to give it the desired characteristics. Nor does the picture change if the relationship is viewed in institutional terms. To say, as has been repeated recently, that the army paved the way for fascism is a statement that is not supported by any valid evidence other than cases of collusion between officers and squadristi, sometimes undoubtedly serious, but which in no way can be

considered to have been encouraged by the top brass of the armed forces. This is all the more true if, after stating that thearmy paved the way for fascism, it is said that the opposition appealed to it during the Matteotti crisis to overthrow Mussolini, but 'in vain because the king would not break with Mussolini'. It is clear that this second statement either implies that by paving the way for fascism, the army had conformed to the will of the sovereign, which is completely untenable, or drastically downplays the first and brings the question of the attitude of the armed forces back to its real terms, those of the more general attitude of the liberal-democratic ruling class towards fascism between 1920-21 and 1924-25. What this attitude was and how it changed as Mussolini, having overcome the Matteotti crisis, strengthened his power and gave birth to the fascist regime has been amply discussed in previous volumes, so there is no need to dwell on it here. It is more useful to try to see,within this attitude, the peculiarities of that of the military leadership. Scholars agree on one point: at least for the Army and Navy, the relationship with fascism must be seen as substantially parallel to the relationship between Victor Emmanuel III and Mussolini. And this is not only, as everyone says, because the sovereign, convinced as he was, as has been said, that "dynasties generally last longer than individual men and their governments," if he could accept a series of erosions of his power by Mussolini, he was not willing to relinquish control over the armed forces, the only element on which he could realistically base this conviction; but also because, we would add, even within the armed forces, beyond the lively and active sentiment of loyalty to the monarchy, there was a similar concern at work: that of finding themselves exposed without any "cover" to the intrusiveness of fascism, to its desire to extend its power over all institutions, including the military, to its never truly abandoned plans to restructure the army, and to its concealed but certainly unquestionable hostility towards "the military caste." Hence a convergence of fundamental interests which constitutes, in this particular aspect, a sort of common thread running from October 1922 to July 1943, although more visible at some times than others. While this was certainly the most distinctive aspect of the military's attitude towards fascism, it was certainly not the only one. In order to obtain a realistic picture of the relations that existed from the outset between the highest military hierarchies and the fascist government, it is necessary to take into account other facts, seemingly trivial if you like, but nonetheless significant. The first is the jealousy, rivalry, and conflicts that characterized relations between the Army and the Navy, which were soon compounded by those arising from the establishment of the Air Force as a separate branch (viewed unfavorably above all by the Navy, to the extent that, together with the creation of the post of Chief of Staff to be assigned to theArmy, the cause of Thaon di Revel's resignation as minister in May 1925). Historiography has ignored or underestimated the weight that these jealousies, rivalries, and conflicts had throughout the Fascist period. Hence the tendency to give political interpretations or explanations in terms of cultural and technical backwardness to episodes that had little or nothing to do with politics or culture and which should instead be seen essentially as manifestations of those rivalries and conflicts. A typical case is the so-called "Di Giorgio crisis" that developed between November 1924 and April 1925, to which everyone, given the particular political moment in which it occurred, tended to give an excessively political significance, which, however, did not have for the

opponents of the new army order project developed by Minister Di Giorgio and which, if it did, only potentially, when Mussolini and Farinacci found themselves having to assess the consequences of the possibility that, by insisting on supporting the project, the votes against it by the senators representing the military establishment would be joined by those of the real opponents, and this could give the vote a politically false image. The minutes of the session of the Army Council dedicated to examining Di Giorgio's project (November 10-12 November 1924) show that the concerns of the opponents, led by the very active General Giardino, were not political in the strict sense, nor were they based on principle, and only minimally technical. The real concerns were others, primarily financial and then related to relations with the other branches of the armed forces: 'the entire project, based," as it was, "on financial necessity," i.e., on the state's economy, did not provide for "precise limits" on the cuts imposed on the Army's budget (and therefore on its "efficiency") , and these in turn seemed 'disproportionate' to those imposed on other administrations and, within the armed forces, on the Navy and especially the Air Force. Another typical case worth mentioning is the clear opposition that the Air Force expressed throughout the 1920s, and essentially thereafter, to the construction of aircraft carriers, which was permittedItaly by the Washington agreements and requested by the Navy. This opposition, as Canevari wrote, originated essentially in the Air Force's fear that the establishment of a Navy air force would cause it to lose its monopoly on air power and, in our opinion, is to be seen as the origin of the "competition" that troubled relations and collaboration between the two forces for years, in peace as in war, the relations and collaboration between the two arms (typical in this regard is the dispute over torpedo bombers). This "competition," after the end of World War II, turned into an absurd controversy over "responsibilities' which, in addition to making the Navy appear in the wrong, certainly did not benefit the prestige of the two branches or that of the Italian armed forces in general. Equally underestimated were the jealousies, rivalries, and conflicts within the individual military leaderships, especially those of the Army. The earlier-than-expected end of the conflict in November 1918 and the instability of the political situation in the years immediately following had prevented the emergence of a figure of true prestige, capable of influencing, as in other countries, theattitude, if not of all, at least of a large part of the Army establishment and to act as its spokesperson in relation to the political world and the government, as well as effectively defining the balance of power between the various power groups. Given this situation, it is easy to understand how the temptation to use politics to further one's career and strengthen one's own position and that of one's friends over that of one's opponents and competitors, which had already manifested itself in the years immediately following the warimmediately after the war, became very strong for many, especially among the younger or more controversial generals, especially after the Matteotti crisis had made it clear that fascism would last a long time and that, like it or not, the sovereign would prevail. This led to a series of consequences that not only make it impossible to accept the point of view of those who spoke of a tacit political alliance between the armed forces and fascism, according to which the armed forces did not have the essential prerequisite of free choice and bargaining power (the events of July 25, 1943 should not be misleading, since they were made possible only by the war now lost and fascism in complete crisis), but which, on

the contrary, made it easy for Mussolini to ménager their leaders. Indicative of this is the ease with which, having exhausted their task as 'guarantors', Diaz and Thaon di Revel himself (for whom Mussolini had more esteem and a certain gratitude for his attitude during the Matteotti crisis) were forced to leave the government, and even more so the way in which, in less than three years, the military leadership was restructured both at the ministerial level and at the level of the General Staff. There was a lot of patriotic-military rhetoric, a small shower of marshal ranks skillfully distributed "impartially" among Cadornists and anti-Cadornists, those responsible for Caporetto and the architects of Vittorio Veneto, outré conservatives and former collaborators of Giolitti and Nitti, in order to satisfy and at the same time dissatisfy everyone (in 1924, Diaz and Cadorna were made marshals, followed two years later by the Duke of Aosta, Badoglio, Caviglia, Giardino, and Pecori Giraldi), a few million more in the budget than the cuts initially requested by De Stefani, as well as a series of small operations conducted on the one hand to hint at the possibility of measures particularly unpopular with the military establishment (first and foremost, that of merging the three military ministries into one) and, on the other hand, resorting to the classic expedient of divide and rule, were sufficient to bring the armed forces under substantial control without formally touching anything that might have authorized Victor Emmanuel III to consider an alteration of the relationship between the dynasty and the armed forces. At the ministerial level, the resignations of Di Giorgio in April 1925 and Thaon di Revel the following month were handled with extreme skill by Mussolini (and Farinacci): in practice, the Duce's assumption of the two ministries of War and the Navy (and the newly establishedAir Force) took on the character of a designation by the military establishment, and he appeared to be a sort of savior of the armed forces, even though in reality they were giving up one of the things they were most jealous of, having their own men at the top of their administrations. Nor is the argument valid that Mussolini was, due to his many commitments and his incompetence in military matters, a "figurehead" and that, therefore, the ones who really mattered were the undersecretaries, who were all military men. However overworked and incompetent he was, Mussolini controlled almost all the "political" activity of his ministries, and as for the undersecretaries, only the Navy undersecretary, Admiral Sirianni, and the Air Force undersecretary, General Bonzani, were men of the establishment. But Bonzani remained in office for less than two years and was then replaced by Balbo, who two years later was promoted to minister, and Sirianni, at that moment, was the man Mussolini needed: in a period characterized by financial difficulties, a substantially static international situation, and Albertini's naval policy. To which Mussolini, after a brief silence, replied: "Albertini no, we cannot resign." Given the laconic nature of the note, it is difficult to say whether Thaon di Revel's intervention was dictated by the conviction that it was his duty to support Mussolini or by the fear that the latter, resuming his "freedom of action," would plunge the country into the turmoil of civil war. All conditioned by the negotiations for naval disarmament and the question of parity with France, an influential member of the Navy establishment, was the right person to manage a shipbuilding policy focused on medium and light vessels and to keep the supporters of the construction of large battleships in check. As for the War Ministry, the most politically sensitive of the three ministries, Mussolini's choice fell on a

military man, General Cavallero, undoubtedly a man of great intelligence who had distinguished himself in the final phase of the Great War (and who was also one of the youngest generals), but also a military man sui generis, who was not part of the establishment and who, to the great scandal of the latter, had taken advantage of the Army's evacuation measures decided by the Nitti government after the war to place himself in a special auxiliary position and move intoprivate industry, eventually becoming central director of Pirelli (as he would do again, going to work for Ansaldo when, at the end of 1928, he had to leave his position as undersecretary), only to return to the army in 1925, precisely to be appointed undersecretary. He was an ambitious and unscrupulous man who, apart from Diaz, had no real support in the new establishment, but was well regarded in the industrial world and whose candidacy had been championed by Farinacci and who, as soon as he was appointed, worked to establish the position of chief of general staff (absorbing that of chief of staff of the Army) and, with Farinacci's support, advocated to Mussolini its assignment to Badoglio, who had been removed from Italy at the end of 1923 and sent to Brazil as ambassador extraordinary for having declared the previous year that he was ready to repress fascism by force. At first glance, Badoglio's appointment on May 4, 1925, may therefore seem surprising, but apart from the fact that Badoglio had been taking direct and indirect steps to ingratiate himself with Mussolini for some time, it must be borne in mind that from a political point of view his choice was certainly not without significance. The future Marshal of Italy had in fact a solid, but certainly not very strong, position in the Army (which, if it had been able to express its own name, had others in mind) but certainly not a very strong one (many did not forgive him for his role in Caporetto and the successful career he had nevertheless enjoyed immediately afterwards), and he was certainly not well regarded by either the Navy or the Air Force, which saw his new position as a diminution of their prestige and autonomy, and he still had opponents even in some sectors of fascism. In this situation, everything suggested that he would inevitably be led to tie his fate to that of Mussolini and work in tandem with Cavaliere, as he did. And, in any case, Badoglio (who instead favored General Scipioni, who was closely linked to him) was imposed as his deputy with the clear intention of keeping a close eye on him by one of the men he disliked most and who was on excellent terms with Mussolini, General Grazioli. It should also be added that the law establishing the office of Chief of the General Staff, while on the one hand removing power from the Army Council, until then the real center of power (which, moreover, Di Giorgio had already begun to undermine by promoting the Supreme Defense Commission, a mixed body composed of military and civilian personnel), making it the advisory body of the Chief of the General Staff (who presided over it), on the other hand, placed it under the direct authority of the head of government with tasks and powers that were, all things considered, limited. It is therefore easy to understand Badoglio's choice: at that moment, for those who wanted to implement a policy of divide and rule and get their hands on the armed forces without giving the sovereign any opportunity to protest, Badoglio was the right man in the right place. This is all the more true when one considers that, being ambitious but not strong enough to realize his ambitions, he was ready to do anything to get on the saddle and stay there. This is demonstrated by the fact that Badoglio did not bat an eyelid and remained in his position even when, after his relationship with

Cavallero had deteriorated in just over a year, his position weakened at the end of 1926 due to his attitude during the so-called "Villa Savoia conspiracy," and Cavallero went on the counterattack by approving (February 1927) a series of amendments to the 1925 law, which, among other things, made the position of chief of staff accessible to the Navy and Air Force, his powers were further limited, to the point of being reduced in practice to technical advice for the head of government, and channeled operationally, as far as relations with the individual branches of the armed forces were concerned, through the respective ministries. Last but not least, the position of Chief of Staff of the Army was made autonomous again. With this, the position of Chief of Staff was rendered practically non-functional, and Badoglio was stripped of much of his authority to the benefit of the Chiefs of Staff and Undersecretaries who worked in direct contact with Mussolini. Moreover, Badoglio did not give up his position even when, less than two years later, the crisis in relations with Cavallero had reached the point of intolerable public demonstrations, the king and Mussolini decided to put an end to them by dismissing Cavallero and sending Badoglio to Libya as governor. Thus, for five years, we witnessed the absurdity of a chief of staff who exercised his duties as full-time governor of a colony and dealt with the various issues under his purview "by correspondence with the chiefs of staff" and with "a few meetings" in Rome, when he went there "on leave or for reasons of service" as governor. This fact, in February 1931, gave the secretary of the National Fascist Party, Giuriati, the opportunity to suggest to Mussolini that he should abolish a position that "the distance of Marshal Badoglio shows that... is now nothing more than a purely bureaucratic body that does not exercise decisive and effective influence on the preparation of the Three Armies" and, at the end of 1933, made Badoglio himself fear that he might lose his position, to the point of prompting him, so reluctant to put pen to paper, to write an incredible letter urging Baistrocchi to help him. Only after the war in Ethiopia had just ended, in August 1936, Badoglio, at the suggestion of one of his loyalists, General Armellini, considered for a moment resigning and retiring with "the halo of the great commander"; but then he changed his mind and continued to play the part of chief of staff without any real power. The period of the Cavallero-Badoglio diarchy, although brief and, after an initial period of idyll, marked by clashes that were, as far as we know, more personal than political, was nevertheless of considerable importance in terms of the relationship between fascism and the army. Looking at things with an unbiased and objective eye, it is impossible to deny that it was during this period that themilitary establishment, and the Army in particular, were virtually sidelined, to the point of having almost no real say in the matter. It was also during this period that the new army regulations, known as the 'Mussolini regulations', were introduced. With a few minor changes, these regulations remained in force until the end of 1938 and, despite their limitations, represented a 'return to realism'1 compared to the 'dreams of grandeur' of the 'Diaz regulations', partly for economic reasons ("the Army system," Mussolini stated unequivocally in the Senate, "is the result of a logical and necessary compromise between the needs of the armed forces and the situation of the Italian forces... as long as Italian finances are in a particularly delicate state, we must carefully measure our efforts, because finance is the basis"), but also partly due to a vision that was somewhat more modern and realistic than that of the establishment (still linked to

pre-World War I schemes) of what a new conflict would be like. The best proof of this is the fact that Mussolini replaced Cavallero with General Gazzera, a man of integrity and solid technical training, who was also an excellent organizer and administrator (so much so that in the fall of 1937 he was named as the successor to General Dallolio at the Commissariatfor War Production), but also very close to Badoglio and anything but flexible in character. Not only did he appoint him undersecretary, but in September 1929 he even entrusted him with the Ministry of War. This choice was certainly influenced by Cavallero's bitter disappointment at not having achieved the rank of minister and his recognized lack of authority and prestige in the army. (in the Federzoni Archive). L. Ceva, Le forze armateci., p. 213. Mussolini, XXII, p. 88. Despite financial difficulties, in 1926 Mussolini, with the obvious aim of currying favor with the armed forces, granted officers significant improvements in their pay. This was while denying them to other categories of state employees (see A. Bianchini, The remuneration of army officers in a century of history, in "Memorie storiche militari," 1980, pp. 353 ff.). "In conclusion, Mussolini's system must be seen as the starting point for a reorganization of the army that would have required several years and another level of funding. From this perspective, the work of Badoglio and Cavallero was essentially positive, even if it was certainly not brilliant or ahead of the developments in, but rather inspired by a moderate and realistic conservatism, which set possible and defined objectives in a Eurocentric and defensive vision of Italy's role," P. Pieri G. Rochat, Pietro Badoglio cit., p. 557. For further information on the technical aspects of the 'Mussolini system', see Ministry of Defense, Army General Staff, Historical Office, L'Esercito italiano tra la I e la 2a guerra mondiale. Novembre 1918 Giugno 1940 (The Italian Army between the First and Second World Wars. November 1918 June 1940), Rome 1954, pp. 65 ff. The "Mussolini system" was essentially the work of Cavallero, who had anticipated some aspects of it in the "Nuova antologia" of December 16, 1924. At first, Badoglio would have preferred to keep the 'Diaz system' in place (most likely so as not to jeopardize his already difficult relations with the establishment) and was persuaded to accept Cavallero's point of view only when he realized that it corresponded to Mussolini's wishes. See S. Pelagalli, Il generale Pietro Gazzera al ministero della guerra (1928-1933), in Storia contemporanea, November-December 1989, pp. 1007 ff. Vellismo: at that time, Mussolini's main concern was the economic situation, so in order to curb the armed forces' requests for new ordinary and extraordinary appropriations, it was better, from his point of view, to do so through military ministers (in addition to Gazzera, Sirianni and Balbo were promoted to ministers in 1929). But the choice of Gazzera was mainly due to the certainty that, by then, the armed forces were no longer a political problem, so that their management could be entrusted without concern even to men such as Gazzera and Sirianni, who were not fascists in the true sense of the word. This being the case, even those scholars who wanted to see the obstacles placed by some ministers to the enrollment of officers in the PNF and the controversy against the MVSN as manifestations of a substantially anti-fascist, if not outright anti-fascist, attitude on the part of the military hierarchy in our opinion, they have fallen (for opposite but ultimately equally ideological reasons) into the same error as those who spoke of an alliance between fascism and the armed forces. Outside of ideological frameworks, these two issues (and others related to them, such as that of pre-military training) should rather

be traced, on the one hand, essentially to the general situation in Italy at the time and, within that context, to the attitude of the liberal-democratic ruling class and, on the other hand, to the particular situation that had arisen in the armed forces as a result of Mussolini's actions within them in recent years. These actions had, if we may use the term, stripped the armed forces of their strength, eliminating or marginalizing those who might still have had any real desire to resist. Thus, as mentioned above, by the end of the 1920s, Mussolini no longer had a problem with the armed forces, or rather, it existed only as an aspect of his relationship with the sovereign and, from this point of view, as an internal problem of fascism, connected to those fascists who, not resigned to his policy of 'endurance' and, therefore, of long timescales, were champing at the bit and, on the basis of political considerations or driven by personal ambitions, wanted to bring the armed forces completely "into step with the fascist revolution" and replace the "military caste" with "true" fascists. From this perspective, a controversy such as the one that arose after World War II between Gazzera and Baistrocchi, his successor in July 1933 (albeit at the level of undersecretary, Mussolini being the minister), about which of the two had 'opened the doors' of the army to fascism, loses practically all meaning. If it is true that Gazzera only towards the end of his ministerial term was persuaded to include membership of the PNF or the Fasci giovanili, the Guf, the Avanguardisti, and the Mvsn, while Baistrocchi began with a statement in which he said that fascism and military discipline are terms that complement, integrate, and multiply each other: hence the need for fascism to fully penetrate our ranks, with all its inexhaustible and irreplaceable resources, with the advent of the Duce at the head of the Army. However, it is a fact that, membership card or not, the penetration of Fascism among the military had now reached such a point that the formal act of joining the PNF meant little. Or, if it had any meaning, rather than having a general political-moral value, it had a very particular value, technical and of corporate self-defense of the establishment, as can easily be seen in Caviglia's defense of the apolitical nature of the armed forces in the Senate in 1926 during the discussion of the "Mussolini order": One of the noblest and most beautiful traditions left to us by the Piedmontese army is that officers must remain aloof from political debates. All our laws on promotion have always been jealous of this apoliticality and have always sought to barricade promotion from any political influence. This is not so much because a certain number of officers, even senior officers and generals, were members of the National Fascist Party (in July 1930, there were 1,211 out of a total of 21,522 in the army), despite the disciplinary regulations requiring them to refrain from public demonstrations of a political nature (which most considered a real prohibition, but not a few interpreted in a restrictive sense), but because in the new climate created by the growing consensus for the regime (and even more so after the Conciliation), the formal fact ended up becoming a contradiction, if not a cause of friction and discontent (almost as if the ban had been imposed by fascism to sanction a sort of political and moral inferiority of the traditional armed forces compared to the Militia) which, at the point where things had reached, was of greater concern to the military (see below for a symptomatic phrase let slip by General A. Bonzani in his memorandum to Mussolini on December 29, 1933) than the "Duce." The latter, in fact, was careful not to raise the issue himself and even tried to moderate the more intemperate fascists. It is

therefore not surprising that it was the military, and in this case the Navy, who raised the issue ofrepeal of the ban on party membership was the military, and in this case the Navy. On February 28, 1930, Minister Sirianni wrote a long letter to Mussolini on the subject in which, after observing that since the state had become fascist in its laws, in its institutions and insignia, it no longer seems conceivable for a civil servant to swear allegiance to the laws of the state and not feel implicitly bound by those laws and their spirit, that is, not to feel fascist. He recalled what Augusto Turati had said three weeks earlier to the officers and cadets of the Modena Academy ('if by politics we mean the old form and the old struggle, then there is no politics for soldiers; but if by politics we mean the spirit of the regime, the essence of the life of the fascist state, then not engaging in politics means being absent from this renewal of institutions and spirits and determining the inability to believe in the living forces of Italy and the homeland'), he concluded: as I said at the outset, I do not consider it acceptable for an officer who is a state official, a political voter, and an educator of men to lack fascist sentiments: therefore, I express the opinion that all officers should be members of the Party. The vast majority would welcome the provision with great satisfaction, and everyone would see it as a reminder of an essential duty. For the time being, Mussolini preferred to drop the proposal. On March 18, the Grand Council approved the following resolution, which Turati forwarded to Sirianni a week later: The Grand Council, resuming the discussion on the membership of Army, Navy, and Air Force officers in the Party, expresses the opinion that that those who are currently members of the Party should remain so, but that their participation in the political organization should be open and known; that no further individual membership should be granted in the future; that any idea of collective membership should be ruled out; that, in order to bring the entire cadre of the Armed Forces more into line with the spirit of the Regime, appropriate propaganda should be carried out in military schools and among the officers, and that the Militia should intensify its efforts to strengthen the spirit of camaraderie with other officers of the Armed Forces; that an invitation should be extended to the commanders of the Armed Forces to ensure that all anti-fascist elements are eliminated from the ranks. acs, Min. Marina, Gabinetto, b. 180. Three years later, in the climate of the "decennial," a solution to the problem was reached: on August 1, 1933, officers on special leave were authorized to apply for membership in the party, provided that their action was "absolutely spontaneous." General officers and colonels had to send their applications to the minister's office, while others had to submit them to the federal secretaries of their area, who would forward them to the party. With his drastic request three years earlier, Sirianni had probably set out not only to resolve the issue at its root and thus prevent it from backfiring on the armed forces, but also to circumvent the danger denounced by Caviglia: if all officers were members of the party, political influences on promotions would have less of a role to play. He was not wrong in predicting that the provision would be welcomed by the vast majority of those concerned. Although we do not have overall figures, the data and information at our disposal speak for themselves: partly out of conviction, partly out of opportunism, the number of officers who took advantage of the opportunity offered to them was very high. Consider that in 1934, in the Navy, out of three fleet admirals designated for the army, two were members of the PNF; out of seven fleet admirals, five; out of seventeen division

admirals, fifteen; five out of nine rear admirals, and twelve out of fourteen generals of the naval engineering corps, naval arms, etc. Nor did things change after the initial moment, so much so that soon it was the party itself that had to worry about it. At first, this was mainly limited to screening applications based on whether or not the applicants had a Masonic background. Later, however, the screening process had to be tightened up. This is evident from an alarmed letter from Admiral Cavagnari (then undersecretary and chief of staff of the Navy) to Starace on October 23, 1935, in which he asks for an explanation as to why, of the eighty-two applications submitted in 1934 by senior Navy officers (admirals, captains, and equivalents), only thirteen had been accepted so far, while nothing was known about the fate of the others. The question of the Militia1 is more complex and lengthy, not only because it dragged on throughout the entire period of Fascist rule, but also because, if one really wants to understand its significance, it is necessary to distinguish between various levels within it and, in the case of the 'political' level, to resist the temptation to draw simplistic conclusions that do not correspond to the complex reality of the relationship between Fascism and the armed forces. The first issue to be resolved is that of the 'hostility', according to some, or 'distrust', according to others, that the armed forces, and the Army in particular, always felt towards the Militia. The person who saw this most clearly, over twenty years ago, was Aquarone, whose essay is therefore a good place to start. That the Army establishment, starting with Diaz, initially viewed the creation of the MVSN with hostility or, at least, distrust is an indisputable fact and can be explained, on the one hand, by the fact that the Militia (also because of its oath to Italy and not to the sovereign, as enshrined in its first disciplinary regulations, that of 1923) disturbed those most attached to the monarchy and, on the other hand, above all in the fact that this 'duplicate' of the Army aroused a whole series of apprehensions that we could define as 'cultural' in some respects, 'technical' in others, and 'corporate' in still others. Not to mention those who saw it as a sort of "'Trojan horse" of the "armed nation" theory advocated by early fascism, which continued to fascinate many fascists even though the party had officially repudiated it. However, these hostilities and mistrust were at least partially counterbalanced by two "positive" facts, which, in reality, were simply two sides of the same coin: at that delicate moment, the presence of the MVSN prevented the Army from having to take a political stance in the event of unrest or serious "subversive" demonstrations and, implicitly, left it the possibility of presenting itself, if necessary, in the untainted guise of an impartial arbiter; and, more generally, the presence of the Militia exempted thethe Army from taking a position, since the status of permanent officer in active service should in itself be sufficient guarantee for membership. Secondly, according to a rumor, membership would only be granted to those officers who had rendered special services to Fascism. Such a measure, if implemented, would give rise to lively discontent and create an unpleasant situation. In fact, they say officers say: either membership is compatible with the applicant's status as an officer, in which case permission must be granted to all, or it is not compatible, in which case no one should have it' (in Archivio Baistrocchi). There is no comprehensive historical study of the MVSn. The best contribution remains A. Aquarone, La Milizia volontaria nello Stato fascista, in 'La cultura', 1964, pp. 259 ff. and 360 ff., reproduced in Il regime fascista, edited by A. Aquarone and M. Vernassa, Bologna 1974, pp. 85 ff. Of much less value is E. Valleri, Dal

partito armato al regime totalitario: la Milizia (From the armed party to the totalitarian regime: the Militia), in "Italia contemporanea," October-December 1980, pp. 31 ff., which, moreover, deals only very marginally with the problem of relations with the armed forces. "public order service," an old aspiration dating back to the beginning of the century, but which had remained frustrated until then. Not to mention a third fact, certainly of lesser importance, but which for a good number of military personnel was not without value: the establishment of the Militia had brought with it the abolition of the Royal Guard, which had been seen in the army as a smokescreen and which, in vain, they had tried to abolish in previous years. This helps to explain why the reactions to the establishment of the Militia were, all in all, more cautious and moderate than might have been expected and than some have claimed in hindsight. It also helps to understand why the hostility and distrust of the military, while never completely disappearing, underwent a process of attenuation and, at the same time, transformation fairly early on. This does not mean, let's be clear, that at certain moments, especially when the Militia attempted to strengthen its position, there was no backlash (the intensity of which, moreover, decreased as one descended the hierarchical ladder) and, especially, that it was widely discussed in terms that made it appear more serious than it really was, particularly with a political undertone that it did not have or had to an increasingly lesser extent. For, in fact, as Aquarone rightly pointed out, echoing an observation by the last chief of staff of the Militia, Galbiati, from the moment the Army became convinced that the Militia was, yes, a reality that had to be accepted, but did not constitute an actual danger and could, in any case, be controlled to a certain extent, hostility and mistrust largely turned into a 'rivalry between officers': between those of the Militia (mostly from the Army), 'who defended their newly acquired prerogatives' and, wanting to extend them further, sought to secure new tasks for the Militia, and those of the Army, "whose General Staff had tried to harness the Militia and make it subservient" for fear that the Army might lose its privileged position and have to share its power with men outside the establishment. "Rivalry between officers" was largely the crux of the problem, which was exacerbated by the fact that those in the Militia almost always held higher ranks than they would have had in the Army, with all the moral and material consequences that this entailed, so that those in the Army felt frustrated, even more so given that the quality of the Militia was not comparable to that of the Army. Various factors contributed to this process, two of which (in addition to time, of course) seem to us to be the most important. First, Mussolini's care in reassuring the military establishment and in dismissing the various proposals put forward by the fascists for the future of the Militia, which, despite their diversity, all tended (even the most moderate and legalistic ones) to use it to fascistize and even transform the Army in its traditional character and tasks and which, therefore, only served to keep alive the mistrust and hostility of the military. Second, the fact that, in the second half of the 1920s, it became increasingly clear to everyone that the Militia would never become an efficient military instrument, capable of truly duplicating the Army, overshadowing it, or even replacing it, and that its foreseeable development would instead be, on the one hand, of a technical-administrative nature (with the Special Militias) and, on the other hand, would be to act as a sort of large employment office. This was especially true with the onset of economic difficulties related to the 'quota novanta' policy and then those

caused by the crisis of 1929. At least formally, it was precisely the fact that these difficulties were arousing renewed hostility towards the Militia among Army officers (whose officers, as mentioned, held higher ranks and therefore enjoyed higher salaries than they would have had in the Army) that gave Turati the opportunity to propose to Mussolini on January 1, 1930, that the Blackshirts and those of their officers who, after an ad hoc course and related exams, proved suitable for effective command. According to the secretary general of the PNF, the measure would have helped to appease the discontent spreading among Army officers, but it would not have made a good impression on the party "if, at the same time, the living forces of the revolution were not brought into the Army." All in all, might make the proposal seem realistic and moderate, had Turati's letter to Mussolini not contained a statement that sounds like a warning bell: 'it is necessary in every way that the army be in the hands of old and loyal Blackshirts' and if we did not know that towards the end of that same year, in some fascist circles and even among military circles more critical of theestablishment, the idea of bringing Turati to the Ministry of War in place of Gazzera was floated, and in the following February Giovanni Giuriati also attempted to indict not only Badoglio, as already mentioned, but also the entire Army General Staff for its antiquated ideas (which led it to prepare, "according to the classic irony of General Mangin...past war'), for his mentality, which led him to be 'spiritually separated from the regime he serves" and for his being not a "service" but a "caste," and again, if we did not know that it was precisely on the basis of this move and a shrewd press campaign that had begun the previous year that Giuriati himself tried to get Mussolini to accept the idea of appointing Balbo as chief of staff. Mussolini, as is well known, dismissed both Turati's and Giuriati's proposals and, speaking to Gazzera about the latter, not only accused Giuriati of occasionally taking "dirizzoni" from time to time, but he reassured him that this would not happen again. It cannot be ruled out that his subsequent decision to personally take over the leadership of the military ministries was also influenced by the desire to cut off further maneuvers and dispel any remaining fears of external interference among the military. He behaved in the same way in July 1933, immediately after resuming the Ministry of War, with De Bono, when the latter played the last card left in the deck of the establishment's opponents, writing to him: Badoglio is beginning to be set in his ways. He is too much like the marshals of the First Empire, who, after the campaign of 1809, did not want to risk anything anymore. And then, as I have already told you once before, you must and can only be the chief of staff. Surround yourself with the experts you consider best so that you have all the data at your fingertips, and that's it. Less well known, however, is that during this same period, Mussolini did not even support an attempt by the Chief of Staff of the Militia, A. Teruzzi, to reach an operational agreement with the Army based on assigning the Militia the tasks of anti-aircraft defense and pre-military and post-military training and, in the event of war, specific tasks (such as assault battalionsassault battalions or light reconnaissance battalions) to the Blackshirts in the Army and on the admission to early promotion in the Army ranks of officers on leave in permanent active service in the Militia who met certain requirements. This was despite the fact that the arguments put forward by the Army Chief of Staff, General A. Bonzani, to reject the request were formulated in such an intransigently negative manner that even some generals, to whom the memorandum drafted ad hoc for

him was submitted, had suggested toning down its polemical tone and, in particular, addressing the unease that, according to Bonzani, the Army's attitude towards the Militia in less dramatic terms and more in line with reality. And above all, in recent months, in a new and very promising phase. Much progress has been made in this field in recent years: relations have improved continuously and progressively, but we have now reached a point where we can say that misunderstandings, mistrust, and uncertainties have given way toby mutual understanding and a desire for more effective collaboration. However, this spiritual understanding cannot and must not be an end in itself: it must instead constitute the platform for concerted action in the technical and organizational fields, such that it allows the two great bodies of the Regime to integrate to the point of forming a single formidable bloc of material and moral forces at the service of the country. Given this premise, let us see what the Militia gives and can give to the preparation of the Army and what the Army can give to the Militia in terms of this contribution. Now that we have moved beyond the phase in which there were fears of a hypothetical danger of a so-called second army competing with the one and only army we all love, the Army must consider the Militia as a great reservoir of spiritual and material energy from which it can draw extensively for the purposes of its military preparation. The Blackshirt battalions, the dicat and compulsory pre-military training, entrusted to the Militia, undoubtedly constitute a contribution of strength given by the Blackshirts tothe National Army, the importance of which cannot be denied and which, in fact, our General Staff has already shown it appreciates. I will limit myself to mentioning these three branches of activity as the most important ones that interfere with the military preparation of the country, but there are others of various kinds that complete the picture of the energies that work in collaboration with the Army. And countless others may arise if the Militia is approached with a fraternal heart, attentively meeting its needs. The battalions could be significantly improved in their efficiency. The Dicat could be perfected and expanded.Pre-military training, brought to the highest level of perfection, could be the focus of reforms whose scope may vary according to the intentions of His Majesty, but which can in any case be expected to be very interesting. The establishment of the post-military, which the Ministry intends to implement in the near future, will be added to the Militia's activities aimed at preparing the nation for war. There are thus four main branches of the Militia's work that concern the Army, and we will examine them separately to see where and how they can be improved." The conclusion of Bonzani's memorandum is, in turn, extremely indicative of the essentially corporate spirit that characterized the Army establishment: "Having examined the proposals of the Chief of Staff of the mvsn, I now consider the general question, on which I believe it is necessary to express with complete frankness the opinion of someone who, due to the position he holds and his frequent contacts with officers of all ranks, believes he has a deep understanding of the mentality of the Army's senior officers, even when it is contained within the rigid and austere disciplinary forms in force in the Army. The Head of His Majesty's Militia states that relations between the Army and the Militia are such that it can be said that misunderstandings, mistrust, and uncertainty have been replaced by mutual understanding and a desire for more effective collaboration. He therefore hopes for concerted action by the Army and the Militia in the technical and organizational fields, which will allow the two

large organizations to integrate to the point of forming a single formidable bloc of forces, since the phase in which there was fear of a hypothetical danger of a so-called second army, competing with the one and only army that everyone loves, is now over. If only that were so! But unfortunately, this is not really the case. The Army did indeed overcome the phase in which it feared the danger of a second army for a certain period: this period corresponded to the one in which the Duce, with his unsurpassed intuition and his profound knowledge of the mentality of the two armed forces, divided their tasks between them in an unequivocal manner: the Militia is the armed guard of the Fascist Revolution against internal dangers; the Army the armed guard against external dangers. This period corresponds to the provisions still in force today, according to which, in the event of mobilization, all members of the VSN Militia (except those of the ccnn battalions and the dicat) follow the fate of their respective draft class and rejoin the ranks of the Army, which, for its part, always keeps them on its rolls and takes care of their training as far as possible. Due to these provisions, Army officers, albeit reluctantly, and in obedience to a rather controversial paragraph of the Disciplinary Regulations, but reiterated by Circular 3100 of the Ministry of War signed by the Duce on April 6, 1930, resign themselves to not being able to join the Fascist Party until they are in service, and to observing a political neutrality that is, in reality, much more apparent than real: because their membership of the PNF, combined with the fact that the younger classes on leave and those of conscription age were completely Fascist, would in fact have made the MVSN almost superfluous. On the other hand, no one ever thought of abolishing it, given the great merits it had acquired. Precisely because of this last consideration, thethe Army willingly accepted the establishment of the CCNN battalions, the Dicat, and the Milizia Confiniaria, and will willingly accept, for example, the Milizia di Frontiera and any coastal infantry and artillery militias. But, of course, always with the clause that, despite the fact that at least one of Teruzzi's requests, the one relating to the preliminary, was very close to his heart, he had publicly committed himself to it and was well aware that Bonzani's refusal should not mean that the same provisions whereby all members of the MVSNA with military obligations fall under the exclusive command of the Army in the event of mobilization should apply in peacetime as far as the organization, training, and deployment of the above-mentioned units are concerned; and this not because of less noble and generous sentiments, but because of the deep conviction, continually proven by experience, that every organization, whatever it may be, must scrupulously respect the hierarchy and end up on a knife edge in order to be efficient. Instead, from that period onwards, too many facts indicate a continuous tendency, if not towards the formation of a second army, certainly to preparations for war, separate from those of the Army. Without mentioning maneuvers with army corps cadres directed by general officers of the Militia, or the establishment of schools for Militia officers parallel to those of the Army, it suffices to mention the proposals now made by the Chief of His Majesty's Militia to group together ccnn battalions under the command of senior Militia officers who have a wide range of ranks in the Army, to limit the supervision of the training of ccnn battalions, and even pre-military training (which can only be visited by corps commanders, or by other general officers delegated by them), to the desired absorption of post-military training, which the Army cannot renounce; to the proposal to exclude Army authorities from

MDICAT training; to justify the feeling of ever-increasing interference by the Militia in the Army's field of competence, and of a separatist tendency, contrary to the integration that would be desirable and that can only be achieved with a unity of command, direction, and budget that is not limited, as it is now, to the highest authorities alone, but is spread throughout all levels of the hierarchy. Therefore, mistrust still exists, aggravated by the concern that war training is entrusted to people who are enthusiastic, full of enthusiasm and goodwill, but not always equipped with the necessary professional skills. This mistrust is indeed a serious evil, which should be eliminated as soon as possible. This goal is certainly not easy to achieve, and I certainly cannot propose a solution that meets all requirements, because I do not know the Militia as well as I know the Army, and because the issue also has a political dimension, in which I am not competent. But as far as the Army is concerned, of which I feel I am a confident interpreter, there is only one solution: to fully implement the above directives of the Head of Government, without any shifting of tasks and responsibilities. In other words, the Militia should continue to fulfill its task of armed guard of the Revolution against any internal enemy, but leave everything concerning war preparation to the Army. The ccnn units with military purposes should therefore be entrusted completely to the Army authorities in everything that reflects their organization, training, mobilization equipment, and preparation for war. The current restrictions on the interference of the military authorities in these units should therefore be abolished. These restrictions derive from the fact that the latter already depend on the higher commands of the Militia, but do not take into account the fact that the latter have no training or operational duties over them in either peace or war. In relation to these concepts, the Army's organization could, for example, be modified as follows: the infantry branch includes line infantry regiments, grenadiers, bersaglieri, Alpine troops, and permanent or reserve ccnn units. The artillery branch would include field artillery regiments, mountain artillery regiments, etc., and permanent or reserve ccnn units, similarly, if necessary, for other branches. In all ccnn units with wartime duties and therefore under the command of the Army, the fundamental requirement of voluntary service would be scrupulously observed, and that of correspondence between rank in the Militia and rank in the Army. The recruitment of the CCNN would be ensured by a CCNN inspectorate that would be part of the Ministry of War and would be the liaison body with the general command of the MVSN. The MVSN budget would have to transfer to the War budget the sums it now spends annually on the personnel of the CCNN battalions, the MDICAT, and the Border Militia. The War budget would provide for all the remaining needs of the CCNN units of all arms. Although the permanent part of the CCNN units consists solely of cadres, their dependence on the Army would offer enormous advantages from every point of view, both for the units themselves and for the Army in general, both in peacetime and in wartime. The budgets of the Army and the Militia would be more accurate, and also better exploited. See Mussolini, XXIII, p. 94. In October 1931, Mussolini had one of the most heated clashes of his long collaboration with Gazzera, who refused to provide the rifles requested by the Militia, motivated not so much by the conviction that the Militia was incapable of ensuring pre-military efficiencyefficient pre-military force, but rather by a hostility of principle (whose roots went back a long way, to the controversies of the early decades of the kingdom

between "Savoy" and "Garibaldians") of the most conservative part of the establishment towards any type of pre-military and post-military training (which it nevertheless preferred to the former), especially if not completely managed by the Army1. This is confirmed by the fact that within the military leadership itself there were those (led by General F. S. Grazioli, not coincidentally a staunch opponent of thedoctrinal immobility of the most conservative part of the establishment2) who did not agree with it at all and had been working since before fascism to bring about such an education. But even with regard to the other requests, Mussolini had already expressed himself favorably in some way, and there were laws, provisions, and precedents that, to a greater or lesser extent depending on the case, supported the idea. The reasons given for the refusal were that it was not possible to provide more than what was already available because "the army only has the weapons necessary for the minimum mobilization scenario." Mussolini (who in a similar circumstance in December 1928 had accepted Gazzera's point of view) responded to the refusal (October 14, 1931) with a very harsh handwritten note that read as follows: "Dear Gazzera, have the necessary rifles given to the military, otherwise it will not be serious. It would be better to give them walking sticks or church candles. No one eats rifles. Things are either done or not done. I have also heard about university officer cadets (excessive severity in theoretical exams). I have always preferred a brave man to a professor" (in the Gazzera Archive). According to what Undersecretary Baistrocchi said on March 30, 1936, speaking at the second course of advanced military studies, the issue of pre-military training also played a significant role in the military opposition to the "Di Giorgio system" (in the Baistrocchi Archive). It is also significant that, of all the memos written by Badoglio in October 1925 to illustrate the fundamental lines of the new army system that he and Cavallero were to develop, the only part that the "Duce" did not accept was that dedicated to pre-military training, in which the new Chief of Staff spoke out against "any state organization responsible for such training" (see P. Pieri G. Rochat, Pietro Badoglio cit., p. 553). This was all the more so given that, in the following December, Cavallero issued a ministerial circular instructing the Militia to provide military training in all municipalities where it was able to do so. A subsequent law of December 29, 1930, made pre-military training compulsory and established that the relevant courses (the gradual introduction of which was entrusted to the Ministry of War) were to be 'normally' entrusted to the Militia. In the early years of Fascism, Grazioli chaired the National Physical Education Authority, which was supposed to ensure the physical training of students on a mass scale and their 'integral masculine preparation for war'. He founded the Central School of Military Physical Education and suggested to Mussolini that he establish a physical education school to train instructors who would be entrusted with pre- and post-military training. In the 1930s, he headed the General Inspectorate for the Pre- and Post-Military Training of the Nation, becoming an advocate of the theory of the "military nation," or the "permanent military training of all the nation's valid forces," which he presented as the fascist realization of past aspirations for an "armed nation," all more or less vague and demo-socialist in nature. In January 1934, Grazioli presented his thesis on pre-military training to the Army Council and, given its lack of success, sent Mussolini and Baistrocchi an ad hoc memorandum. The introduction reads: 'Pre-military training must essentially create and develop in citizens,

inthe final stage of their youth education, i.e., between the ages of 18 and 21, all the physical, moral, and intellectual qualities that can facilitate the subsequent rapid transformation of the citizen into a soldier during military service." Finally, at the 1938 session of the Supreme Defense Commission, Grazioli was the rapporteur on the point of 'pre-military and post-military education', arguing that it should be centralized entirely in the hands of the Militia or, better still, the gil, and carried out with criteria of seriousness and truly on a mass scale, with regard to both participants and instructors (no less than 50,000 compared to the 35,000 employed by the Militia). Further details in L. E. Longo, Francesco Saverio Grazioli cit., pp. 372 ff. of the cases, gave them a basis, if not legal, then at least moral. Although on October 1, 1934, Bonzani was replaced by Baistrocchi (who, as was already the case in the Navy and Air Force, thus came to combine the functions of Undersecretary of War and Chief of Staff of the Army), undoubtedly more 'political' than his predecessor and less tied to the establishment, it took several more years for the Militia's requests to be taken into consideration and, above all, it took the war in Africa with all that it entailed in terms of the internal balance of the regime and its very character. Despite this, their acceptance by the general staff was opposed and only partial. The question of pre-military training (this 'machine of colossal proportions', as Mussolini said in 1937, thanks to which 'no other nation in the world, except Japan, is on a par with us in terms of the preparation of young people') dragged on for two sessions of the Supreme Defense Commission, in 1937 and 1938, and was resolved (February 1938) more in words than in deeds, entrusting its organization to the gil. Post-military education, on the other hand, was "for the time being" dropped due to the economic and organizational difficulties it entailed. Similarly, nothing truly conclusive was established for anti-aircraft artillery. So, in practice, things continued largely as before. Finally, as regards the most important and political aspect of the whole question, that of the Blackshirt battalions and, in essence, the relationship between the Army and the Militia, this was addressed, before Italy entered the war in 1940, first in May 1936, just after the end of the war in Africa in which the Militia had participated with over 100,000 men and its own divisions, and a second time in October 1939, under theeffect of Mussolini's statement on September 30 in Genoa: From the usual corners, news has emerged of conflicts between the Militia and the Army. Let it be clear that the Militia is the Party with the musket; it remains the guard of the revolution, which has made contributions of blood and sacrifice in the wars in Spain and Africa and which effectively performs the tasks of a military instrument for the defense of the nation. One hundred and forty-two battalions will have the honor of becoming an integral part of the Army divisions from now onArmy and will contribute to strengthening the bonds of sincere, fraternal camaraderie between these two forces, whose sole objective is the defense of the homeland. In 1936, the issue was considered by the Ministry of War in the context of the new military requirements arising from the conquest of Ethiopia and, in particular, studies relating to the possible creation, alongside the metropolitan Army, of a colonial army, so that, if necessary, the two could "act in parallel, each in its own environment, without the need to weaken each other". The Militia was to form the "base" of this colonial army, providing it with seven divisions (approximately 56,000 men) out of ten metropolitan divisions; nevertheless, all senior command and general service personnel (as well as those of the indigenous units) were to

be provided by the Army. "note" accompanying the project clearly indicates that, for the Ministry of War, the organic integration of the Militia into the colonial army should have been a first concrete step towards a "natural solution" ("as determined by a convergence of needs") and a "spiritually perfect ' ('as there is no better cement than blood shed in common') of the issue, namely the merger of the Militia ('while retaining' certain characteristics that are beneficial to the nation's military efficiency) with the Army. We are informed of what the next steps should be by a "Outline of the study on the 'Problem of the Militia'" prepared by the Ministry of War with the dual aim of resolving the issue of the Militia, but also of enabling the Army to better cope with the "pressing needs determined by the introduction of new weapons and means, by territorial requirements, and by colonial requirements." With this dual aim in mind, theArmy to be constituted of three groups of forces: armed forces operating at the metropolitan borders, territorial forces, and colonial forces. The Militia was to participate in all three: in the colonial forces in the terms already mentioned, i.e., "with its own large units"; in the forces operating with light infantry battalions, "assigned as supplementary troops to the C. A."; the territorial army with the special militias, the Dicat and the Dacos (anti-aircraft and coastal defense) and with garrison battalions "tasked with ensuring the military-political-economic defense of the national territory, safeguarding the peace and life of the country, and securing the rear of the operating armies." Quantitatively, this amounted to about 25,000 men (32 battalions), drawn as volunteers from the seven or eight youngest classes, for the armed forces, to 35,000 men (30 battalions), drawn from the older classes, for the territorial army, and 50,000 men, drawn, like the former, from the younger classes. The latter were in constant and complete readiness, while the others were 'in potential readiness', i.e. in the form of small groups of cadres within the legions on which to base both the training and mobilization of the units, except, of course, those of the special militias. The 'Scheme of the study on the Italian colonial army' provided, among other things, for measures to be taken to keep as 'militi coloni' (settler soldiers) those soldiers who, after colonial service, were willing to remain jfi^HÓnià? According to the plan prepared by the ministry, the Militia was finally to obtain its own legal status and be subject to the same laws, regulations, and general provisions in force in the Army. As for its officers, about two thousand (of whom more than 1,300 were serving in the colonial army), they, "like those of the various branches of the Army," should have constituted a separate role, but should have assumed the rank held in the Army "for the obvious purpose of equalization with the other branches." We do not know why nothing was actually done in the end. However, it is natural to think that there were many reasons. On the one hand, the decision was probably influenced by the order that Mussolini gave to Baistrocchi in September, which the latter tried in vain to have revoked, to bring back from Africa the weapons and materials that were, in his opinion, no longer necessary for the defense of the Aoi: it is clear, in fact, that after this order, the idea of creating a colonial army became, at least for the moment, impossible, and this made a decision on the future of the Militia less urgent. On the other hand, it is very likely that Italy's intervention in the Spanish Civil War also had a significant impact.intervention in the Spanish Civil War also played a significant role. The different attitudes of the Army and the Militia and the spirit of competition and self-assertion that the

latter brought to its participation in the conflict make it likely that the Militia itself preferred to postpone any decision, counting on being able to strengthen its bargaining power in the meantime and thus obtain better conditions at a later date. For example, with regard to the recognition of the ranks of its officers. It does not seem insignificant that, in October 1939, when the issue came up again, one of the most significant points, from this perspective (another was the assumption by the chief of staff of the mvsn of the functions of deputy chief of staff of the Army), of the new project drawn up by the cabinet of the Ministry of War would have been that of the entry into the Army of permanent officers of the Militia, maintaining the rank they had in it. The substance of this new ministerial project is all on its first page: The speech of September 30 to the hierarchy in Genoa officially raised the long-standing issue of the definitive structure of the Militia. The experience of recent years has in fact highlighted: the evolution of the original mainly political and paramilitary aims and characteristics towards markedly military ones; and with regard to the Army: the emergence of numerous needs, which can only be rationally and fully satisfied by entrusting them to a single body that unifies and coordinates them. In other words: the MVShas established itself as a State Militia. It has accentuated its military characteristics; it has taken on a structure and activities similar to those of the Army; it has made such a contribution of blood and sacrifice that it deserves the legal recognition to which its members have long aspired; within the Army, there is a growing need for a widespread body that unifies and fully assumes the vast tasks of training the masses in , recruitment, and mobilization: a body that can be constituted precisely by the Militia. Therefore, there is a need for the two bodies to merge, creating a situation that is extremely favorable to the integration of the Militia into the Army. Having made this general introduction, the project partly followed that of three years earlier and partly differed from it, as the idea of an Army based on three large groups had since been abandoned. The tasks of the Militia were thus indicated: war operations with undivided battalions in the infantry divisions; conscription, recruitment, mobilization; post-military training and government of the entire discharged mass; relations with the country. These tasks, therefore, like those envisaged in 1936, were largely focused on territorial service, made, moreover, more in tune with the totalitarian imprint that the regime had meanwhile been assuming, as we saw in the previous volume, and which is clearly evident from another page of the project: The Militia, using its widespread organization, which makes it present in almost all the municipalities of the Kingdom, would fully assume the functions of: constant updating of the training of the discharged masses (post-military, officer courses, etc.); governing the discharged masses (discipline, advancement, military associations, etc.); conscription and recruitment; military mobilization; civil mobilization; defense of the territory in times of war: tasks that are currently devolved to various bodies, with interference and dispersion of energy. The practical implementation of these tasks, which are truly exceptional in scope, could take place through the following organization: military zone commands, military districts)

- • • [in principle: one per province civil districts) municipal military commands. The newly established municipal military commander would be the representative of the Army in the municipality and would regulate all paramilitary activity in the municipality itself: training of discharged personnel; relations with the Armed Forces;

changes in discharged personnel (changes of residence, expatriation, deaths); discipline and supervision of military personnel on leave; assistance with conscription and military and civil mobilization operations; implementation and observance of military regulations; etc. This "commander" would normally be the highest-ranking military personnel on leave in the municipality. No remuneration; only reimbursement of expenses incurred and some recognition in the form of advantages in promotion, the granting of some free rail travel, and the like. With this new institution, military requirements would become deeply embedded in civilian life and the Army would acquire that integral adherence to the life and order of the Nation which alone can allow the realization of the true "military Nation," that is, the "citizen soldier" (rifle and uniform permanently in the possession of the individual, who responds to the radio call). The life of the municipality would thus be entirely regulated in its fundamental activities: administrative and political: mayor and secretary of the National Fascist Party; religious: parish priest; military: municipal military commander. Naturally, the measure would have to be limited to municipalities without a garrison. As with the 1936 measure, we lack reliable information to determine the reasons why the project did not come to fruition this time either, although everything suggests that it had more than just Mussolini's general approval. However, it is not unreasonable to think that the main reason lies in the particular political moment. When the measure was being studied in October, Italy's participation in World War II, which had begun the month before, must have seemed anything but certain and, in any case, not in the short term, such that it could be implemented without creating difficulties for the military machine. As the possibility of Mussolini's intervention in the relatively short term became more likely, the idea of postponing it began to gain ground among everyone. Both for technical reasons and because everyone thought that Italy would only intervene if it had the chance to wage a short war, it was better to postpone it until after the war was over and wait and see (and this seems to us to apply above all to the Militia, but it cannot be ruled out that it may also apply to at least part of the military leadership) how the balance of power between the Army and the Militia and, more generally, within the regime would evolve. The only measure taken for the time being was to 'introduce' the 132 battalions of the Blackshirts with their respective commands into the Army units on March 1, 1940, assigning 82 of them to 41 infantry divisions and 26 to army corps (22 in Italy and 4 in North Africa), while the other 24 formed their own divisions within the XXII and XXIII army corps stationed in North Africa. Italy's entry into the war three months later, blocked any other measures, even partial ones, with the result of creating the conditions for new reasons for controversy and conflict between the Army and the Militia, which the merger would have avoided (or given them a different meaning) and which would prove to be more serious (if not in themselves, then because of the speculation and rumors they aroused) than the old, traditional ones, which had now largely disappeared. We will have occasion to discuss these causes of controversy and conflict later on. However, we would like to mention one of them now, the most important of all, especially since, as we will have occasion to say, it constitutes one of the essential points of reference for discussing one of the most widespread clichés about participation.

Italian participation in World War II, according to which volunteering during that conflict was much less widespread than in 1915-18, which would constitute yet another proof of the different state of mind with which the two conflicts were experienced by Italians. This is true, but it involves other, more complex explanations and an adequate understanding of the difficulties encountered by volunteering during World War II. One of these was the fact that, with Italy's entry into the war, the Militia not only found itself in a situation where it no longer had its own sources of recruitment to make up for the shortcomings of its units, replenish its losses, and form new units, given that conscripts and those called up for service all reported to theArmy, which was uncompromising in enforcing the rule, but it also found itself hampered by the Army's concern about any depletion of contingents not yet called up for continuous service and by the considerable difficulty in drawing on young volunteers, who tended to turn mainly to the Blackshirt units. This led to the emergence, from the early months of 1941, of a lively conflict between the Militia and theArmy, which continued throughout the war and which even Mussolini's personal intervention in mid-1942 failed to resolve, with the Army insisting that volunteering in the ranks of the Militia was detrimental to its quantitative and qualitative efficiency, and with some of its leaders seeing the Militia's requests to draw on volunteers as a maneuver with a view to 'tomorrow'. Typical in this regard is a memorandum ('Premilitary youths in the MVSN') drawn up on August 12, 1942, by the Premilitary Office for Land Conscription. It reads: The general command of the MVSN has obtainedthe Duce's approval of a draft plan to draw young people from the pre-military ranks for its own formations. The decisive reason for the request was the need to rejuvenate the ranks of the Militia for the formation of assault battalions, which, generally consisting of men who were no longer young, due to conscription and call-ups to the Royal Army Army, threatened not to fully meet the objectives assigned to them. Evidently, drawing on this contingent need, which in truth has only a relative basis, since in fact the assault battalions, limited in number, do not require the availability of large numbers of young people, the general command of the MVSN intended to resolve a general problem that goes beyond the contingencies and tends to avoid the growing depletion of its ranks. With the issue framed in this way, direct agreements were made between the general command of the mvsn and the general command of the gil to implement the general provisions approved by the Duce, and circular no. 64 dated June 19, signed by Deputy Commander General Bonamici, was issued to all federal commands, setting out certain rules for the voluntary enlistment of young people in the Militia, where they would be required to fulfill their pre-military obligations. The circular does not impose any restrictions on the number of young people joining the Militia: it stipulates that the Legion commands of the MVSN must proceed with theenlist those who have reached the age of 170 and who have voluntarily applied through the competent federal commands of the gil; that only those already enrolled in the sea and air forces, as well as those designated for the land forces, should be excluded; vigilant and active propaganda must be carried out to encourage young people to serve in the ranks of the Militia. The provision in question, in its practical implementation, would undoubtedly have detrimental effects on thethe efficiency of the pre-military land forces. The immediate consequences would be, above all, the depletion of the general pre-military formations.

Already subject to reductions for other known reasons, the pre-military land forces need provisions to protect their integrity and their numerical and qualitative efficiency, so that they can respond to the needs of the Army, which must take precedence over all others. The swelling of the ranks of the MVSNA at the expense of the active forces of the Royal Army. In this regard, it seems appropriate to note that the Militia is concerned abouttomorrow's efficiency rather than today's, due to the very nature of enlistment, which, being voluntary, requires special research, careful selection, and intense and convincing propaganda: conditions which ultimately result in damage to the Army's arms and specialties, from which the best elements tend to be drawn away. the particular requirements of pre-military training. It should be noted, in fact, that a large part of the instructors for pre-military training are provided by the MVSN, which would naturally be inclined to reserve the largest number for its own courses, without taking into account the general pre-military training that alreadysuffering from a shortage of instructors. For example, there may be cases of minor importance, where there are only a few young MVSN pre-military personnel, who are assigned two or more instructors drawn from the ranks of the Militia, while much larger formations of the land forces are unable to find enough instructors to meet even the most basic needs of the formations themselves. This inconvenience, in essence, would aggravate the instructor crisis, already felt in previous courses and now more keenly felt throughout the suburbs, as a result of the state of emergency, which allows ever less choice among officers, non-commissioned officers, and enlisted personnel of any category. d} The moral factor. It is inevitable that the propaganda of the Militia, supported by greater possibilities of attraction, will have a moral impact on young pre-military conscripts, who make their anonymous mass contribution to the needs of the nation in arms, with the disparity in treatment that is a natural consequence of a nation seeking to gain converts from the masses themselves emerging very easily... From what we have said so far, it seems to us that we can draw a preliminary conclusion. Although it was an open issue, by the end of the 1920s the question of the Militia in and of itself was not the crux of the relationship between Fascism and the Army, much less between Fascism and the armed forces as a whole. It was an open issue which, however, time was beginning to resolve and, in any case, was more a 'rivalry between officers' and a question, on the one hand, of culture and, on the other, of the assessment ofthe efficiency of the Militia from a technical-military point of view, rather than a political issue. If it was still a political issue, it was so only in limited sectors of both the military and Fascism. To understand the relationship between Fascism and the armed forces, it is therefore necessary to consider it from a different, broader perspective, in which certainly includes the question of the Militia (as well as that of the monarchy in its dual relationship with the armed forces and with the evolution of the regime), but does not exhaust it, and in which it is necessary to take into account at least three points of view: the fascists and the military closest to them, the establishment, and Mussolini. In the fascist camp, the question of the Militia had by now become almost solely an opportunity, a pretext for triggering and pursuing a debate whose motivations and objectives went far beyond the relationship between the Militia and the Army. By now, almost no one had any doubts about the Army's loyalty to the regime. Nor would these resurface in the following years, even in the most difficult moments (obviously before the

end of 1942), such as September 1939 and the winter of 1940-41. Two examples seem indicative to us, especially since they refer to two very different "souls" of fascism. On September 13, 1939, Farinacci wrote a letter to Mussolini that was a veritable indictment of the Undersecretary of War and Chief of Staff of the Army, General A. Pariani (who had succeeded Baistrocchi in October 1936 and who would be dismissed less than two months later by Mussolini and replaced by Soddu and Oraziani), whom he accused of not strengthening but "wrecking" the Army and thus causing a serious state of "discouragement and mistrust"." At this point, we are not interested in whether the criticisms were right or wrong; what is striking is that Farinacci did not make any accusations of anti-fascism against either Pariani or the Army and did not go beyond stating that the "fascist spirit had not penetrated the Army in any way" and that fascism had "shown consideration for certain people whom the revolution was supposed to sweep away."1 Nothing more. From the pen of Farinacci acs, Duce's private secretary, Correspondence (192 2-43), phase 2 4 2/R, "R. Farinacci," sub-file 3 9. On the situation of the army, Farinacci wrote: "I do not want to dwell here on the shortcomings that have been found, which have revealed not only the impossibility of supplying the units being formed with theplanned armament, but also the insufficiency of ammunition, the deficiencies of the cadres, etc., etc.; but I want to point out that, finding ourselves in these conditions, we have nevertheless proclaimed a war of swift action! And this is the tactical doctrine that must correspond to the system, the spirit, and the education of fascism. But in order to wage a war of swift action, the war machine must be able to carry it out. To preparethe Army for a rapid war that is not rhetorical but substantial, it is first necessary to strengthen its organization, build up its armament, and adapt its training. This is how any serious Army worthy of the name proceeds. What has been done? The organization has been disrupted. The measure relating to the binary division was a severe blow to the Army's structure. You were right when, in your speech in Calatafimi, you called for a halt to this course of action. And Pariani deliberately hid the truth from you. Pariani proclaimed that the binary had performed very well in Spain. This is not true. Everywhere, the binary had to be reinforced with additional battalions, as you yourself had predicted. The binary performed very poorly. However, with nine battalions, we will once again have a kind of ternary, but with battalions that are not well-coordinated, with one less regimental command (which means poor organization) and part of the artillery less, with fewer executive bodies, connections, etc. Therefore, a worsened ternary. Now, of course, nothing better can be done than what you have believed to provide, and going back would mean giving the organization another shock; it has already had enough. Another organizational upheaval is that of the cadres. Abolishing compulsory leave and non-cadres does not remedy the problem, now that we have lost a number of good elements through compulsory leave, who had experience of war and of whom there is certainly no abundance. The rejuvenation of the officer corps is a wise measure, but it requires moderation, and this has been lacking. Then the number of posts in the rank of general has been increased too much, devaluing this rank in all its categories. In this respect, our army has become a kind of Mexican army, with an immense hat on its head above a thin body. Below, in the lower ranks, the base has been destroyed. By halving the annual intake of military academies, the army has been literally murdered, whose essential prerequisite is

the strength of the lower ranks, which form thethe backbone of the smaller units, which are responsible for detailed combat. If this backbone malfunctions, everything falls apart. Now, no army has ever taken such a leap in the dark. There have always been difficulties in advancement, and there always will be. No country has ever had immutable laws or regulations on advancement. It is necessary to be vigilant and intervene from time to time with successive adjustments to existing laws. France operates under the 1858 promotion law. The result we have achieved is that we have practically no junior officers in command of platoons and corresponding units and very few in command of companies; and this is already the case today at the beginning of mobilization. What about reserve officers? The nation provides us with officers who are well prepared spiritually, at least the younger ones. But this is not enough; those who do not realize this shortcoming fail to see the essential foundation of the structure of the smaller units. This shortage of junior officers cannot even be compensated for by the availability of a sufficient number of good non-commissioned officers. So, with few lower-ranking career officers and extremely scarce non-commissioned officers, how are we going to organize our units and gradually enhance the use of reserve officers? The truth is that our units are poorly organized. As forarmament is barely worth mentioning. The artillery is in the well-known condition: guns left over from 1918, ammunition that is adequate in terms of overall number of rounds but poorly assorted in terms of calibers, and therefore insufficient; infantry weapons are being converted to rifles, ammunition is sufficient for the 45 mm bomb launcher, which is not a very powerful device, but is non-existent or almost non-existent for the 81 mm bomb launcher, which is the essential accompanying weapon. What is more, only ten divisions are equipped with the new accompanying weapons. As for thefield artillery, it is well known that 45 regiments have been or are being obtained by dismantling the 30 existing ones (because the operation was poorly prepared) and that about 16 divisions have no artillery. The Po Army is armed with toys; it lacks serious training. The maneuvers inwere a terrible game of child's play. This is the army that Pariani has prepared for a war of swift decision... A few words about mobilization. Pariani says that he does not take plans into account; that his plan is defined at the last minute. Fine, as far as deployment is concerned. But mobilization and assembly are delicate mechanisms, so delicate that to think of improvising or changing them profoundly at the moment ofexecution, is simply criminal. Mobilization for Albania was improvised, but it was a disaster for more than half the Army. Now the method is being repeated and the disaster is becoming widespread. Pariani says that his procedure is protected and made possible by the presence of border guards. This is dishonest sophistry. Border guards are an advance cover and nothing more. No cover has ever been conceived by any army other than to make possible a carefully preordained mobilization and assembly. And you should know that mobilization and assembly take place in a chaotic manner. Nor should the deplorable state of the warehouses be hidden from you, so that the clothing of those called up is almost always incomplete, with garments and shoes often already worn out, while we have called up more than a few classes so far and are far from general mobilization... It is also honest and necessary to declare the state of discouragement and mistrust that has existed in the army for some time and has now worsened significantly. The highest-ranking officers deny their trust in General Pariani and express this sentiment

in private conversations, but do not dare to show it otherwise. The Royal Carabinieri have lost their complete freedom of judgment and reporting due to obscure maneuvers originating from the Ministry of War. In the lower ranks of the Army, daily contact with obvious deficiencies that cannot be remedied has a deleterious influence that is poorly counterbalanced by the high spirits and devotion to the regime that animate our best officers. There is unanimousthe Army, there is clear and now unreserved distrust in the work of the War Ministry. Many would like to inform you directly, but they fear, as has already happened, that all reports addressed to you will end up in the hands of Pariani. This statement is not intended to be sterile criticism but aims to conclude in a constructive manner. The following measures could be extremely beneficial to the efficiency of our Army, provided they are taken without delay: Clearly separate the function of the Undersecretary from that of the Chief of Staff, as it is not possible, in an organization as vast and complex as the Army, to keep the two functions combined at particularly serious times. It should be remembered, in this regard, that the combination of the two positions, which was wisely not extended to the Army at the time for the Navy andAir Force, was very wisely not extended to the Army, and it would have been better not to change this state of affairs, which today should definitely be restored. Promptly review the mobilization mechanism in case it should be continued, excluding, of course, any radical changes, but only for the purpose of preventing and avoiding any last-minute improvisation, as is currently the case. Require that the reorganization of units, which is now underway and threatens to continue indefinitely, be stopped immediately; and proceed with the completion of the number of units that the available resources allow, starting with the most advanced ones, and then continuing with the subsequent units as and when the necessary resources become available. Review deployment plans, especially if they are less immediate in relation to the actual size of the available units. Immediately increase the number of cadets for regular or accelerated courses at military academies, without exceeding the number so as not to create bottlenecks that would lead to future career congestion; this is independent of any special courses for reserve officers. Intensify the training of units, especially those not on the front line, instead of leaving soldiers to their own devices or lying around in barracks as is the case today. To do this, it is essential that the constant movement of personnel from one corps to anotherone unit to another and from one department to another must be strictly curtailed. Finally, there remains the still unresolved problem of the effective and real coordination of the final preparation and deployment of the three Armed Forces. Such an admission, even if ex silentio, is extremely significant. Equally significant is what Bottai wrote to Mussolini in May 1941, returning from the Greek front, Bottai wrote to Mussolini in a memorandum to which we will return later: Here we come to one of the most burning issues of the ongoing war: the relationship between the army and politics. Somewhere, the army has been accused of apoliticality: which is to say of anti-fascism, if not of anti-fascism..In reality, it can be concluded that it would be unfair to speak of anti-fascism in the Army in terms of apparent politics, that is, recognition of the regime and its institutions. On the contrary, formal zeal is abundant. But if we move on to look for fascism in terms of intimate and jealous political convictions, the conclusion is different: we realize that in the upper echelons of the Army, Fascism did not generate formal adherence, but rather a lack of

real knowledge of the moral, political, and economic reasons that inspired our Revolution. The discourse that, at the end of the 1920s and especially at the beginning of the 1930s, interested the Fascists who were most politically sensitive and who considered Fascism a revolution was essentially another, less immediately political and much more, cultural, so much so that it was put forward by figures who, on other, more strictly and immediately political issues, had diverse and often conflicting positions, so that they often found themselvesonly agreed that Mussolini, after his successes, was becoming bourgeois and, without realizing it, was leading fascism to sink into the quicksand of a regime with which they identified less and less and considered to be an expression not of fascism but of its supporters. Applied to the problem of the armed forces, this meant accusing Mussolini of being dominated by men loyal to the regime and who, at best, might have had everything of a fascist, but would never have had either the mentality or the perception of how much reality, all reality, and therefore also military reality, had changed with the First World War. Nor should it be underestimated that, to a greater or lesser extent, with different nuances and technical knowledge, this argument was also taken up by sectors, certainly a minority but not insignificant, of the military world, which, in some cases, may have been motivated by ambition or personal hostility towards Badoglio or Gazzera or some other leading figure in the military hierarchy, but which, ultimately, saw them as the products and representatives of an establishment thatthey considered culturally and morally outdated and therefore inadequate for the responsibilities entrusted to them, and in fascism the new element, born of the war, capable of bringing 'new air', 'new ideas' and 'new spirit' into the military leadership. This was, in fact, the real driving force that in the early 1930s brought together men who were otherwise very different: Giuriati, Balbo, Farinacci and, on the other hand, Grazioli, Pirzio Biroli, Zoppi, and Canevari. It should be borne in mind that each of them also had other objectives, such as political power, career advancement, etc., but this is not sufficient to disqualify their intentions a priori. This is all the more true given that the subsequent events of Italy's participation in World War II and, even before that, certain measures adopted in thefinal period of peace, showed that, while some of their criticisms and proposals were wrong, others were not at all. Above all, it does not help in the slightest to understand the historical reality of the relationship between fascism and the armed forces. Theexperience of war, whether they had participated in it or, all things considered, even for those who had lived it from the 'home front', was the essential element of the biography and 'culture' of the fascists. It is not possible to stop, as is often done, at the most blatant manifestations of this experience and this 'culture', such as, on the one hand, 'contempt for human life' and the 'cult of violence' and, on the other hand, the myths created or activated by the war, is not possible. Scholars such as Paul Fussel and Eric J. Leed have begun in the last decade to highlight the significance that the experience of the First World War had for the personal identity and behavior of those who took part in it. Their research, undoubtedly very important, has focused on the war years, addressing only in very preliminary terms the impact of the internalization of the war experience on the behavior of veterans in the years immediately following the end of the conflict, so that to date there is no real study that has addressed the problem of cultural transformations in the proper and anthropological sense determined by the First World War. As far as Italy and the

particular aspect that interests us here are concerned, some points of reference can nevertheless be identified with some certainty. The first of these points of reference, essentially the framework within which all the others are placed and acquire meaning, is the modernizing experience represented by the war. If the war was amodernizing experience, as Leed rightly observed, it was because it fundamentally altered the traditional sources of identity, the old conceptions of war and of men at war: the Great War was a turning point in the history of industrial civilization because it fused material realities and "traditional" mentalities in a completely unexpected and unsettling way. For those who had experienced it intensely, the modernity of war and its value as a break with previous wars was a dogma from which, on a pre-political level, one could only escape by taking refuge in pacifism or by accepting it with all its consequences: the decisive importance of industry, technology, machinery and, therefore, aircraft, and, ultimately, the emergence of the idea of 'total war', which would make no distinction between the front in the traditional sense and the 'home front', the country, as important as and even more important than the former, and which would therefore involve, actively and passively, all citizens, and would thus take on the character of a 'war of the peoples'. This idea, on the one hand, implied a technical assessment of war, but on the other, it also implied a political and moral assessment: the next war would have a 'democratic' character, within individual countries because it would involve all citizens equally without distinction, and externally because, by involving all citizens, it would take on a revolutionary character of a war of the poor peoples against the rich peoples. Finally, it would be a war that would have, in addition to its own completely new techniques and strategies, its own moral rules, very different from the traditional ones, which were still "chivalrous." Typical in this sense are the works of General Giulio Douhet, an author who enjoyed considerable success abroad (for his well-known work The Command of the Air), but who interests us here above all for his influence on the military conception of the fascists, and not only in terms of aerial warfare. An expression in more ways than one of the debates, ferment, and cultural transformations that took place between thebeginning of the century and the outbreak of war, and in which he himself had participated (think of positions such as those of E. Barone, F. Ranzi, and A. Di Giorgio), Douhet often acted as a conduit through which the most innovative cultural experiences of the pre-war period merged with those arising from the war and, leaving the military "guild," reached the fascists. In his Probabili aspetti della guerra futura (Probable Aspects of Future Warfare), published in 1928 in the notebooks of the National Fascist Institute of Culture with a preface by Giovanni Gentile hoping "that all Italians would read these pages and prepare themselves," Douhet started from three "obvious truths": Future warfare will still engage nations with all their resources, none excluded. Victory will smile on the nation that manages to break the material and moral resistance of its adversary before the latter manages to break its own. The armed forces will be all the more prepared to face future warfare the greater theapproximation with which the question "What will future warfare be like?" is answered, and the more closely the armed forces are shaped to the real needs of future warfare. After this introduction, his speech focused on the "radical revolution" in the nature and forms of warfare brought about by the air force. Until the last war, "armies functioned as organs of indirect attrition of national resistance, and navies as means of

accelerating or delaying this attrition"; after it, while armies and navies tend to break the enemy's resistance indirectly, the weapon of space, having the ability to reach the very sources of resources, tends to break it directly, that is, more effectively and quickly. Previously, one had to be content with destroying a battery with cannon fire: to destroy a battery, that is, a morally stable and disciplined organism, materially created and designed to receive cannon fire and respond with cannon fire; today it is possible to destroy the workshop where the cannons are built, that is, an organization that is morally and materially vulnerable and incapable of reacting in any case... An army can advance on the enemy's capital by confronting the opposing army, defeating it, and pushing it back in the desired direction, through long, painful, and costly work; the weapon of space can aim to destroy the enemy's capital even before the order to mobilize has been issued and war declared. There is no comparison between the effectiveness of direct and indirect destructive action against the vital resistance of a nation. When the latter could present the strong and solid armor represented by armies and navies to enemy blows, the blows fell on the body of the nation heavily cushioned, for a long time almost unnoticed... Direct attack on the material and moral resistance of the adversary will accelerate the resolution of conflicts and therefore make wars shorter... There is only one truly effective means of defending against air attacks: to gain control of the air and, that is, putting oneself in a position to prevent the enemy from flying, while retaining that ability for oneself... Even a brief consideration of the advantages of possessing air supremacy leads one to agree that its conquest will have a decisive impact on the outcome of the war... The conquest of air supremacy will be a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for victory in future wars. It will always be necessary and sufficient when the victorious air force has the offensive capability to break the enemy's material and moral resistance. When it does not have this capability, the battle will be decided by land and sea forces, which, for those who dominate the air, will be in the best position to act with full effectiveness... It is now commonly felt that future wars will begin in thethe air and that major air operations will be carried out even before the declaration of war, because each side will try to exploit the advantage of surprise to its benefit... Therefore, air warfare will be decided by the air forces present and ready at the outbreak of hostilities. No allowance can be made for air forces to be created during the war. The defeated party will no longer be able to rebuild its air force. From the importance he attributed to the air factor, Douhet and those who adopted his theory drew a series of conclusions that did not only concern the air force, some of which are worth mentioning here in order to better understand the positions and conflicts that divided the Italian military world in the 1920s and especially in the 1930s and exacerbated the hostility of the fascists towards it. In particular: that the Air Force should be given priority in the use of available resources over other branches of the military; that the "auxiliary air forces" (of the Army and Navy) were useless and, indeed, harmful, which took resources away from the Air Force itself and would be useless if the enemy gained control of the skies; and, finally, that the air defense of the territory would be practically futile and therefore had to be considered uneconomical due to thethe immobilization of aircraft, which also took them away from offensive use. Nor, in Douhet's conception of future warfare, was the relationship between the Air Force on the one hand and the Army and Navy on the other limited to the

question of priorityaccess to resources and their distribution or in more technical matters, such as auxiliary aviation. For Douhet and his followers, the advent of air power entailed "profound and radical changes" in the nature and use of the Army and Navy. The "colossal modern armies," now exposed to air attacks against their lines of communication and supply, had to be "lightened" and made as autonomous and independent from their bases as possible; Similarly, navies also had to disengage from overly restrictive ties to their bases and bear in mind that an enemy "dominating the air" was now able, "whatever its situation at sea," to interrupt maritime traffic by putting ports out of service. Hence the need to set aside outdated ideas, schemes, and structures and to rethink and reform just about everything. This view was shared not only by Douhet's more or less strict followers, but also by many others, both military and civilian. However, in order to fully appreciate the value that this call for renewal had for many fascists, it is also necessary to understand how much and in what terms the particular nature of their war experience and its continuing psychological weight influenced it. This weight was so strong that it constituted another of those points of reference that cannot be ignored if one does not want to stop at the surface of certain facts and attitudes but, on the contrary, penetrate them to grasp their roots, their cultural influences and the part they played. This is not only to obtain a more complete and detailed picture of the 'cultural' influences of this experience, but also to understand the reasons behind a series of contradictions that they carried within them and which often manifested themselves in relation to very important issues. A case in point is the unresolved contradiction (which, on closer inspection, can also be found in the 'Direttive per l'impiego delle grandi unità' [Guidelines for the use of large units] drawn up in 1935 by Baistrocchi) between the two beliefs that infantry remained, despite everything, the 'queen of battles' and that war was essentially a 'game of numbers'.for the use of large units' drawn up in 1935 by Baistrocchi) between the two convictions that the infantry remained, despite everything, the 'queen of battles' and that war would now be a mechanized and mobile war, to be fought essentially with equipped with their own mechanized combat vehicles, which, however, were entrusted with specific and temporally limited tasks. The experience of the First World War had, on the one hand, resulted in the dogma of modernity and the decisive importance of everything that derived from it in the field of warfare, and, on the other hand, had given rise, both independently and by contrast, to the dogma of the absolute inadequacy of the military leadership. This was in relation to how it had conducted operations and the masses entrusted to it in the "old' war (decisive in this regard was the trauma caused by the exhausting trench warfare, the futility of the massive bloodshed, often verging on outright massacres, stubbornly imposed on combatants to defend or conquer objectives that later proved irrelevant, and the events at Caporetto), but even more so to how he would conceive and direct the "new" war. Characteristic in this regard is the difference that, on closer inspection, existed between Mussolini's "political management" of the "greats" of the 1915-18 war, Cadorna, Diaz, the Duke of Aosta, Capello, and the attitude towards them, including Capello, when he was still a fascist, of the vast majority of fascists who had fought on the front: albeit with some nuances, for them they were all incompetent authoritarian butchers. One need only leaf through the unofficial military publications and fascist war memoirs to realize this, as they are full of criticism and scathing referencesof the

conduct of the war, the mentality of the high command, and the 'caste' of the general staff. 'Proud and presumptuous blindness', 'sterile pedantry', 'formalistic stubbornness', etc. are recurring terms, as are accusations of being afflicted with 'karst syphilis' and of only ever looking backwards, never forwards, always to yesterday's patterns, never imagining new situations to which to adapt. Typical of the latter is what Douhet wrote at the end of 1925 in his Critical Summary of the Great War, which, not surprisingly, opened with a preface by Giorgio Masi, one of Farinacci's right-hand men: War is a struggle: indeed, it is the greatest of struggles. Everyone struggles in life...; for everyone, life is a perpetual struggle and a continuous battle. For everyone, except for professional soldiers. In fact, they are only called upon to fight during war: normally, they do nothing but prepare to fight. And they can only prepare themselves theoretically, abstractly, ideally, because they cannot experiment. Suddenly, the man who, because of his profession, has never acted, has never really fought, finds himself at the helm of the greatest struggle that can occur and must act intensely.This explains how vain ideologies that do not stand up to reality can form and consolidate in the military environment, and how professional soldiers are by nature traditionalist and inclined to look back... They have only the experience of the past at their disposal, and it is human nature to cling desperately to it... Nor is it enough. In the civilian sphere, the struggle takes place within the categories themselves...The most effective automatically excel because they are victorious, thanks to their greater practical performance. In the military category, since war is not waged but prepared for, there is no assessment of practical performance and it must be replaced by a conventional performance based on presumption.... And there is an aggravating factor. It is human nature that those who occupy a position, even if only by convention, forget the convention and end up convincing themselves that they occupy it because they are truly suited to it... And then man is led to excuse and justify, even before his own conscience, and in perfect good faith, all his mistakes... That is not enough. In themilitary sphere, the search for truth is not possible. The search for truth requires freedom of discussion and criticism, and discussion and criticism cannot be allowed in the military sphere. The military can only obey or command. This state of affairs in turn determines a state of mind, namely that it is easy to forget that this privilege of partial infallibility is a fictitious creation derived from the necessities of discipline and hierarchy, and to become convinced that it is, instead, something real and concrete. In other words, superiors come to believe in their own infallibility, and the higher they are, the more they believe in it, that is, the fewer infallible people they have above them. Therefore, the military hierarchy constitutes a kind of pyramid in which, by necessity, truth can only descend from the top to the bottom. The countless young and lively forces at the bottom are crushed by the weight that weighs upon them, and their luxuriant sap cannot rise in any way. Thus, the entire pyramid comes to present a composed, correct, but antiquated character, and at its apex, consisting of a few isolated individuals, abstract and unreal ideologies can arise and take root, which gradually descend to the base in the form of axiomatic truths. And it is in this static isolation that the most serious struggle that the nation may be called upon to fight is abstractly prepared. While the theorist Douhet kept his discourse in terms that were, all in all, general terms, others took it to a more concrete level, transferring the criticism from the 'sociological' to the 'historical' plane, that is, to the

military conduct of the 1915-18 war, and to the technical-political plane, which was then the actual subject of the dispute over the restructuring and moral and material preparation of the armed forces that began in 1925-26, which they considered not so much insufficient, given the economic difficulties, as conceptually erroneous, due to the antiquated ideas and lack of internal stimuli to adapt to the changed social and military reality typical of the military leadership. A letter sent on November 1, 1930, by General Grazioli to Mussolini, together with the text of an article he wrote in response to a book recently published by Marshal Giardino and then not published at Gazzera's request, gives a glimpse of the point of view of that minority of critics who were part of the leadership: Our military preparation, Grazioli wrote to Mussolini, in my opinion, is proceeding methodically, and, without a doubt, is gaining ground every year. But it would be desirable for it to be conducted in every branch with a more vibrant, lively, inspiring, and ingeniously reformist spirit, so that all the new spiritual and material elements that the renewed Italian life now offers us can find free and open ground to express themselves and give their best performance. And then, inevitably, given the substantial typical versatility of our people, the whole rhythm of our military preparation would take on another pace and another momentum; the cold official doctrine would be animated in individuals and in the community by that fresh breath of bold and generous initiative, distinctly fascist in character, which I believe is essential to instill in our armed forces, so that the E.V.'s far-reaching foreign policy can count at all times and for all eventualities on an offensive instrument, albeit measured in size and weight, but vibrant like a steel blade in the fist of a nation that wants to make its way in the world at all costs. A point of view that shines through more clearly in the report that Grazioli wrote for Mussolini after witnessing the large-scale maneuvers carried out in Ukraine by the Soviet army. In it, the general did not limit himself to expressing his largely positive opinion on the efficiency of the Soviet army, emphasizing, among other things, the government's efforts to create "a plentiful and powerful air force" and to experiment with all the most modern means of warfare, including paratroopers. but, seizing the opportunity to make a typical speech "to his mother-in-law, so that his daughter-in-law would understand," he vigorously emphasized what, for him, was one of the main reasons, if not the main reason, for this efficiency: the civil war had brought about a radical renewal of the military hierarchies. In other words, he wrote without too many circumlocutions, it had freed thethe USSR army from all traces of outdated doctrinarism and, from the outset, gave the institution a fresh imprint of tactical originality, inspired by the concrete needs of war or real guerrilla warfare, an advantage that not all other modern armies can boast because, having just emerged from the world war, especially if victorious, they fell, more or less passively, prey to pre-war doctrinarism , reinforced by the misoneistic encrustations that even the war had failed to dissolve or break. A much clearer and more explicit picture of the state of mind and criticism thatwithin the armed forces themselves, can be gleaned above all from the series of articles "Lo spirito e la materia" (The Spirit and the Matter) that Lieutenant Colonel Emilio Canevari wrote, as we have already mentioned, in September 1931 to advocate a radical reform of the military institutions and criticize the Gazzera-Badoglio administration-Badoglio administration, which were published in Il regime fascista. In these articles, the accusations of abstract thinking, doctrinarism, and traditionalism incapable of

understanding the needs of the new times made by Douhet and Grazioli took the form of a series of criticisms that allow us to better understand what those accusations actually meant to those who made them. Limiting the discussion to the most important ones, it can be said that one was that of having essentially remained with the "senseless" theory of war of attrition and, therefore, of lacking any idea of how to prevail over the adversary. Canevari wrote on this subject: "Indeed, the more one studies the dual problem of the preparation and conduct of war, the more one must be convinced that its solution is closely linked to theattitude of the leaders. It is not a question of having a good organization or excellent resources and then studying how to use them: this will not lead to a good solution because the problem is upside down. Instead, it is a question of establishing tactical objectives and subordinating the organic, structural, and technical characteristics of the resources to them. There is only one center toward which all rays must converge: combat, the destruction of the enemy forces. Once you have determined what you want from combat, in what physical environment it should take place, in short, once you have established your tactical objectives, everything becomes rational and relatively easier. Modern industrial possibilities are so vast that the military leader can essentially askindustry for anything he wants: all he needs is a clear vision of the tactical objectives in the coming war and, consequently, to know what he intends to achieve with a particular weapon or means. Another accusation was that of unnecessarily multiplying the number of divisions and continuing to consider the strength of an army on the basis of that number, to the detriment of efficiency, armament, and speed of mobilization: Tactical progress basically consists in increasing power and mobility; without both, nothing good can be achieved in war: one is incapable of decisive action without the other.A modern division, rationally armed, requires a transport system so developed and such a consumption of gasoline that the means envisaged and provided for by the 'doctrine' formed after the war will prove completely inadequate. Instead, a powerful effort by the entire national industry in this direction is needed, otherwise it will be futile to set up division after division... Some post-war armies believe they have solved the problem by preparing a vast framework of divisions that should multiply in wartime, that is, they are preparing the armed crowds of the second period of the war. These armies will inevitably be poorly armed, equipped with scarce means of mobility and composed of men who are no longer young... This is due to the stubborn criterion of relying solely on the number of men available, believing that they alone can constitute a force, while men alone, with limited means of power and mobility, are good at best for defense, taking advantage of this form of warfare, but they can never produce a decisive outcome. It is therefore necessary to prepare smaller armies, part of which are always mobilized and part of which can be mobilized with lightning speed, but equipped with all the modern means of power and mobility in order to give the fight the dynamic and decisive character that is necessary to win. This limitation is also due to the opportunity to employ elite elements and young elements in theoperating army, and, on the other hand, to adapt mobilization to the industrial and supply capabilities of the country. This army, limited in number but fully staffed and perfectly armed and equipped, would not be the framework, but the school and model of the war army, the best means for training leaders and troops and for maintaining a lively and continuous drive towards technical

progress. In light of all this, it is difficult to consider the attempts of Giuriati, Balbo, even Farinacci, and the groups of military personnel more or less connected to them, aimed at taking control of the Army, only as the result of their political desire to completely control the Army itself. In our opinion, the reality is, as usual, more complex and nuanced than certain schematizations tend to make it appear. There is no doubt that this political desire existed. However, there was also a desire for the effective modernization of the army and a new relationship between the three branches of the armed forces that would enhance the role of the air force. The decision to focus on Balbo is significant: from a purely political perspective, there were certainly other names that could have been suggested to Mussolini; names that were less difficult for him, that would have aroused less mistrust and fear in the establishment, and that could have served as a bridge to a future fascist leadership tout court: Grazioli, for example. This was all the more so given that Balbo had been targeted by the establishment in 1931-32, which, in the Supreme Defense Commission, had seized theopportunity during the discussion on anti-aircraft defense issues to attack him thoroughly: on the one hand, it had implicitly accused him of insensitivity to the conditions in which the civilian population would find itself in the event of war, i.e., exposed to enemy air attacks and unprotected by its own air force, which he had conceived in the Douhetian manner for the purpose of attack, and in the event of retaliation; on the other hand, ithe had accused (through Bonzani) of having unilaterally altered the proportions established by the 'Duce' between the various air force specialties to the advantage of bombers, while at the same time contesting (through Badoglio) the effectiveness of high-altitude bombing. And finally, there was a whole psychological and cultural attitude which, right or wrong, cannot fail to be considered pre-political and which contributed greatly to fueling these attempts and making them look sympathetic to those who were involved in them. And so we come to the military establishment. Given their socio-cultural background and training, and with the position of the sovereign now taken for granted, in the early 1930s the regime, in general political terms, appeared to the leaders of the armed forces to be much richer in areas of light than of shadow, and these were for the most part of secondary importance: as with other members of the pre-fascist ruling class, it was very often a question of a lack of 'style' and 'good taste', which was unpleasant but certainly not enough to overshadow the regime's 'national merits'. With the war in Ethiopia (initially opposed by both Badoglio and Baistrocchi) and the intervention in Spain (which Baistrocchi was also not in favor of) the gray areas began to widen and become more worrying, without, however, really affecting attitudes towards the regime. This was prevented by the converging weight of a series of factors, three of which seem to us to be the most important. First of all, the general climate in the country and, as usual, the passive attitude of the sovereign. Then there was the "success effect," which was very strong after the victorious conclusion of the war in Africa (and which, for its main military architects, first and foremost Badoglio, had translated into a series of career and economic benefits) and, all in all, quite remarkable (albeit tinged with criticism, sometimes heavy1, of technical deficiencies and even if he added that he believed that, ultimately, the best defense "will be the rarefaction of cities," as had happened in Paris when the "Big Bertha" kept it under fire. The heaviest criticism appeared in "Il regime fascista" (The Fascist Regime), May 30, 03,6, June 11, 1937, in the form of articles dedicated

to the tactical lessons of the Spanish Civil War, signed by Maurizio Claremoris, i.e., Emilio Canevari. They provoked a vehement protest from Pariani to Farinacci (June 22), who replied curtly, denying the accusation of having "slightly denigrating the means on which we rely for our war" and of having published opinions of "a certain defeatist flavor." On the same day (July 7), he wrote to Mussolini, defending the appropriateness of his newspaper's initiative and sending him a copy of the letters exchanged with Pariani, as well as "a small anthology of letters" of approval sent to him by Marshal Caviglia, Generals Grazioli and Zoppi, and three authoritative writers on military matters, E. Boccaccia, A. Cabiati, and C. Caleffi. Of the letters in question, one in particular, that of Caviglia, deserves to be quoted as proof of how even a man like Caviglia was tied to old patterns, inadequate to the new realities of war: "I immediately read the articles 'Tactical Lessons'. For me, they are persuasive and decisive. The rapid divisions must disappear. All infantry on foot, well organized, well armed, well supplied with ammunition: strong divisions with medium-caliber artillery. Infantry with bombards and very small, very fast-firing calibers (about 37 mm: I had a tough experience with this in the Karst). If necessary, there should be trucks to transport entire divisions and army corps from one point to another. Based on my war experience, artillery should consist of medium and very small calibers. I question the organization of mountain and field artillery, both divisional and army corps. Medium and very small calibers with rapid fire. The main flaw of rapid divisions in which all men are transported by vehicles is that they end up being a gathering of all the slackers in the army. What need is thereto choose the Bersaglieri from among the strongest and most active young men if they are to be transported by vehicle? When the time comes to leave the vehicles and march, there will be trouble. Infantrymen should always be accustomed to marching on foot. If there is a need to transport them, they can be loaded onto columns of trucks, as was done in the Great War. especially in terms of materials) even after that of Spain. Finally, the fact that the establishment in the true sense of the word, both military in general and the Army in particular, which had already been largely sidelined during the Cavallero-Badoglio administration and had been further weakened by the end of the Gazzera-Bonzani era, had emerged from the wars inEthiopia and Spain so renewed and transformed that it no longer constituted a real entity with its own position and effective political weight, but only a heterogeneous power group troubled by jealousies and internal divisions and by the growing tendency of its members to seek support in the political world, which, in turn, tended, on the one hand, to exploit them and, on the other hand, to insert its own men from outside (typical, in this regard, was the reappearance on the scene, at the end of 1937, of Cavallero thanks to the good offices of G. Ciano and Farinacci). Certainly, Badoglio floated above everyone else, rather than dominating them despite his African laurels and despite the fact that he was surrounded by the most powerful group (but a very heterogeneous one, ranging from the so-called 'Badoglian clique' to some of the best generals of the moment, for whom the marshal was the lesser of two evils, and those who still had illusions about him and his moral and political ability to makehis point of view to the sovereign and, with his support, to Mussolini) his real influence was steadily diminishing. His stature as a man and military leader, and even his victory in Africa, were now contested not only by intransigent fascists ("Don't you think," Farinacci wrote to

Mussolini on September 11, 1936, "that Marshal Badoglio has lost all control? Fascism is bitter because it knows two things very well: First, that Mussolini wanted the war, led it, and won it; Second: that Badoglio was opposed to the enterprise. ... The war, with the spirit that animated the divisions sent there and the ample resources made available by the regime, would have been won by anyone. Motorized divisions would be suitable for mobile warfare. If this does not take place, as is very likely to happen on our border, they would have no use and would have to be disbanded or left inactive. Even in the case of mobile warfare, then, on our bordersor beyond, the roads and terrain do not allow for their use. In last year's large-scale maneuvers, it was seen that it was impossible to leave the roads except for the column leaders. The division commanders are very concerned, and these were young generals, very capable and deservedly well-regarded. On the tactical field, as soon as the enormous masses they represent appear, they attract the fire of all the artillery and are put out of action. It is difficult during the day to hide them from view and fire. Bomber aircraft appeared useless for the purposes of the war in Spain. I suppose they half destroyed Madrid, but Madrid did not fall. At sea, however, it is another matter. Assault aircraft against troops in line over a front of hundreds of kilometers can do little, especially if the enemy lines are close. Against marching colonies, it can achieve real success. In pursuit, even more so... During Blomberg's recent visit to a review, I lamented the motorized divisions with Pariani and Baistrocchi. They were not convinced by my reproaches. Send them the articles, as well as to Marshal of Italy De Bono. I told him a few days ago that the only Italian military writers equal to, if not superior to, the best German and French military writers were you and Caleffi' (acs, Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ris. (1922-43), phase. 242/R, "R. Farinacci," sub-file 39). 1 See P. Pieri G. Rochat, Pietro Badoglio cit., pp. 720 ff. que... We agree in exalting the victorious military leader for political reasons, but this must not go beyond a certain point. He has received lifetime allowances in Africa, he has had villas and other honors; he could be satisfied and could stop talking about Fascism, he who in '22 wanted to machine-gun us all..."), but they also found more or less interested critics in military circles. Here, for example, is what an informant for the political police operating in military circles reported from Rome on September 4, 1939: Overall, it appears that Badoglio does not personally enjoy the same esteem among generals as he does among the public. One general said that Badoglio, his schoolmate, is a good mediocrity, but above all a lucky man, and that after Caporetto he should have been put on trial instead of being elevated. Another general believes that he is not an honest man. Everyone says that he is completely anti-fascist. Nor can it be ruled out that in the autumn of 1939, when Badoglio turned 68, there were those who attempted to put together an 'administrative' maneuver to exempt him from service due to reaching the age limit. The maneuver, if it was a maneuver and not a misunderstanding in which Badoglio and his private secretariat fell by misinterpreting an invitation from the relevant office of the minister to request the severance pay due to him, it was thwarted by Mussolini, who ordered that "the Badoglio question" should not be treated "like any other administrative matter." However, at least three facts suggest that there was a maneuver to get rid of Badoglio: at the same time, the "Duce" told the marshal's private secretariat to "consider as unwritten" the letter in which the ministry had raised the issue (which suggests that the letter was not solely for financial

purposes, as claimed by Colonel A. Sorice, who had signed it); that, since at least the last ten days of August, there had been talk of Badoglio's imminent retirement, and General Favagrossa had even been mentioned as a possible new chief of staff; and, finally, that on November 6, evidently to put an end to these rumors and probably other maneuvers of this kind, a very brief statement was issued saying that, "given the current circumstances and the needs of our military preparation," the "Duce" had decided to reconfirm Badoglio in his position, despite the fact that he had reached the age limit. Faced with this reality, we do not think we are wrong in stating that, in practice, at the beginning of World War II, the relationship between fascism and the army (and fascism and the armed forces tout court) had almost completely lost, from a political point of view, one of its two essential points of reference, that of the military establishment, now practically reduced to Badoglio and, as if that were not enough, to a Badoglio who, on the one hand, was greatly weakened and even contested from within themilitary circles and, on the other hand, drawing what remained of his (apparent) strength from two external elements: the sovereign, who, moreover, would not support him at the decisive moment, and... Mussolini, who supported him only for contingent reasons of political expediency: so as not to further strain relations with the sovereign, not to give satisfaction to the Germans and appear subservient to them, to avoid a 'scandal' that would have damaged the regime's image abroad and at home (where Badoglio enjoyed considerable prestige), and to avoid giving rise to discontent in those sectors of the armed forces still loyal to the marshal and, above all, to succession struggles and inevitable discontent among the defeated. In this situation, in order to block Mussolini's path tointervening alongside Germany, Badoglio had only one option left: to resign as chief of staff and clearly explain his reasons for doing so, both from a political and military point of view, thus exposing Victor Emmanuel III and forcing him to take a clear position. However, anything could be expected of Badoglio except such a gesture, especially after Mussolini's proclamation of "non-belligerence." In this new phase, there were only two ways for a man like Badoglio to curb Mussolini: passive resistance, which was more in keeping with his character and his presumption that if he said something, his opinion could not fail to be shared by everyone, and to focus on the unpreparedness of the Italian armed forces and the army in particular. We will discuss the question of the degree of actual preparedness at the time of the declaration of war on June 1, 1940, will be discussed later. In light of the political and, above all, military events that led to Italy's intervention, however, this question loses much of the significance that is generally attributed to it and, certainly, it lost its significance at the time as a controversial argument for Badoglio and those who, like him, had (especially at first) entrenched themselves behind it in an attempt to restrain Mussolini. in fact, it is clear that if one accepted the idea that the war was now practically won and would be over in a few months, since England would either seek a compromise agreement or would not be able to resist direct action against it by the Axis, Italy's state of military preparedness became a completely secondary factor. So much so that it was not used either by the sovereign or by Badoglio; it is difficult to say whether this was because they too were deeply convinced that Mussolini, once again, was right, or because of the skepticism and opportunism that characterized their characters, or because of fear of exposing themselves, in a situation completely different from that of September

1939, to a trial of strength with a very uncertain outcome. We even have authoritative evidence that it lost value even among the military leadership. Extremely significant in this regard is what General Ubaldo Soddu, then Undersecretary of War, wrote in his unpublished volume Di-Melone e riflessioni di un generale (1933-1941) (Di-Melone and reflections of a general (1933-1941)). As soon as the German victory began to take shape in its entirety, we lacked any valid, current, and military argument to restrain Mussolini. The very unpreparedness of the army ceased to constitute (for the moment) a serious danger. At this point, given the essential aspects and moments of the relationship between fascism and the armed forces, both from theperspective of the fascists and the military closest to them, and that of the military establishment, we must now examine the position and modus operandi of Mussolini, starting from two aspects of his personality that largely constitute the premise. The first of these aspects is his 'antimilitarism'. Due to his temperament, youthful education, culture, and life experience (the war of 1915-18 left an indelible and, if one can find traces of it, decisive mark on him) and political conviction, Mussolini always harbored a deep-seated feeling of insurmountable hostility and distrust toward the "military caste," even when he had already clipped its wings and it no longer constituted a real political concern for him. Even though many things had changed profoundly and he himself had changed, in the eyes of the 'Duce', the 'military caste' remained roughly the same as the one he had fought against in his youth and known during the years of the Great War: on the one hand, the stronghold of the monarchy, tradition, conservation and, therefore, one of the strongest, if not the strongest, obstacles to his revolutionary will and power; this was all the more so given its tendency to identify itself at crucial moments not with the state but with the sovereign and to tie its fate to him; on the other hand, it was a group, with rare exceptions, of pompous, presumptuous, professionally modest individuals, unable to break free from the patterns of the past, to adapt to the demands of the new times and to establish a new type of relationship with their subordinates and, moreover, ready to make any compromise and stoop to any level to maintain their caste power and increase their personal power and, worse still, the prestige and benefits associated with it. The second aspect is that Mussolini tended to view all military issues, problems, and situations partly because of his ignorance of the subject, but also because of his mindset, which was entirely focused on the political moment, which he considered to be the truly decisive one. In grasping this, especially after the war in Ethiopia, he felt he was always and only a master of strategic and, above all, political aspects. He therefore postponed and subordinated all other aspects to these and considered the technical objections of the military to be the result of professional deformation, fear of action, and even obstructionism, not to mention the desire to make it impossible to appoint commanders except on the basis of seniority, thus 'legally' blocking the way for younger people and monopolizing all power in his own hands for as long as possible: an aspect of the military's mindset and policy towards which Mussolini would always be highly critical. With these two aspects of his personality in mind, Mussolini's position and modus operandi appear to us to be anything but difficult to understand, less contradictory than is often believed and, all things considered, not very different from his basic attitude in other fields and circumstances. Leaving aside the true fascists such as De Bono and Balbo, one disliked and the other viewed with suspicion by Mussolini, among

those who succeeded each other at the top of the armed forces from 1925 onwards, very few enjoyed the esteem of the "Duce," and almost all of them for relatively short periods: Gazzera, for his methodical approach (even if it sometimes ended up irritating him), his balance, his professional seriousness, his honesty, and his frankness; Baistrocchi and Pariani, for their spirit of ; Cavagnari, for his immediate support for the Ethiopian campaign, when Badoglio, Bonzani, and Baistrocchi himself were opposed to it; Roatta and even more so Cavallero, for their intelligence. The cases of Dallolio, Caviglia, Oraziani, Soddu, and Grazioli. Mussolini's esteem for the former was largely based on the same reasons as for Gazzera, with the addition of sincere admiration for what Dallolio had done during the Great War and especially after Caporetto as head of industrial mobilization and war production. His relationship with Caviglia still appears more complex and less clear. There is no doubt that Mussolini held him in high esteem (with De Begnac, in 1939, went so far as to describe him as the only 'German' staff officer Italy had ever had), but there was certainly also a certain degree of expediency in his relationship with him: the 'anti-fascist' Caviglia was also the most bitter and influential 'anti-Badoglian" among those who had access to Victor Emmanuel III, and this could not fail to play into the hands of Mussolini, who cared only about having a chief of staff who was formally 'authoritative' chief of staff, but one who was essentially controversial and therefore on the defensive and unable, in the absence of other decisive support, to distance himself from Mussolini. Relations with Oraziani and Soddu appear simpler. Esteem for the former steadily declined: high in 1935-36, when Oraziani brilliantly commanded the southern front during the operations in Ethiopia, it began to crack in the following two years, when the marshal held the office of viceroy, and shattered in 1940-41, when he replaced Balbo in North Africa. His reinstatement after September 1 as minister of the Italian Social Republic should not be misleading; on the one hand, it was due to the lack of other figures of a certain popularity and German insistence, and on the other hand, to the fact that Oraziani lent himself well to being presented as 'the anti-Badoglio'. As for Soddu, while it is true that in the early months of the war Mussolini showed him favor, it is also true that this was largely due to the fact that, since May, Soddu had converted to the decision to intervene (and Mussolini had every interest in promoting him as Badoglio's deputy) and had played an important role in the transfer of supreme command from the sovereign to the 'Duce'. The most atypical and difficult to define is the relationship with Grazioli. While it can be ruled out that Mussolini ever had his own 'military advisor" whom he particularly trusted or whose opinion he valued in specific circumstances (as he did in other fields), it cannot be entirely ruled out, based on the available documentation, that Grazioli did indeed have a certain influence on him in the 1920s and 1930s. The "Duce" certainly had esteem and sympathy for him, which he always maintained, almost uniquely, and was keen to express publicly on several occasions. This esteem and sympathy cannot be explained solely by the fact that he considered him one of the best generals to emerge from the 1915-18 war, a sympathizer of pre- the "March on Rome" and an anti-Badoglian, but which must have had deeper roots: he must have been convinced that Grazioli was one of the most genuinely "political" and modern generals in the military establishment, capable of not getting bogged down in mere technicalities and the cult of tradition (his friendship with Douhet and his constant commitment to

implementing mass pre-military training and laying the foundations for a mass military culture must have seemed typical to him) and also one of the most gifted in terms of sensitivity and critical ability to grasp what was happening abroad in both the political and military fields. It is very significant that on December 2, 1942, speaking to the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations on the progress of the war, Mussolini, when discussing operations on the Russian front and claiming credit for himself, in an implied polemic with Hitler, for having been the first to realize the military power of the Soviet Union, said: "We have been the first to understand the power of the Soviet Union, and we have been the first to understand the power of the Soviet Union., Mussolini, having discussed operations on the Russian front and claimed credit for himself, in an implied polemic with Hitler, for having been the first to realize the Soviet military power and Moscow's ambitions to "extend the revolution across the continent and the world through the force of its bayonets," wanted in a certain sense to share this credit with Grazioli: In 1933 or 1934, he said, the Italian General Staff received an invitation from the Russian General Staff to send a commission to observe the Red Army maneuvers taking place near Moscow. I took the opportunity to send a commission, which was chaired by General Francesco Saverio Grazioli, a man of undisputed professional expertise and keen observation skills. When he returned, he gave me a very detailed report, which I read with the utmost attention and which convinced me that there was something new in the East and that theRed Army was now very different from those ragtag troops that were defeated under the walls of Warsaw in 1920 by equally ragtag Polish and French troops... Nor is it possible to ignore at least two other facts: Mussolini's defense of Grazioli when Gazzera, in 1931, wanted to take action against him for the criticism he had directed at him in the press, and even more significantly, that in November 1930, the 'Duce', writing to Grazioli, who had sent him an article he had written in polemic with Marshal Giardino and which he had not published on Gazzera's 'advice', used him, who was so careful at the time to refrain from expressing opinions that, if made public, could upset the military leadership with terms that sounded critical of them. Finally, there is an even more significant fact, especially considering that Grazioli was well known in military circles (even though he had been retired since 1938), but certainly not as well known to the general public: the first person to whom, on September 19, 1943, by Buffarini Guidi, the Supreme Command and the (unified) military ministries of the newly formed Social Republic was Grazioli himself. The offer to Grazioli by Barracu was made only three days later, when Mussolini was informed of Grazioli's refusal (motivated by his advanced age and poor eyesight). Only then, in fact, did the 'Duce' decide to consult Grazioli, whereas initially, as Buffarini Guidi told Grazioli and Grazioli reported to Graziani, he had refused to consider him 'because of the Africa issue'.1 However the relationship between Mussolini and Grazioli may have been (which, in our opinion, is of interest above all because it allows us to form some idea of the type of military man and military culture Mussolini most admired), it is our belief that, as we have already said, the "Duce" never had, either in peacetime or during the war, anything resembling a military adviser. This was not only because of his characteristic distrust of everyone and his conviction-presumption that he could form his own opinion on everything, but also because of what we have defined as his underlying "anti-militarism" and his entirely political mindset. In the true sense of the word,

Mussolini never had a real military policy; he certainly did not have one until the failure of his efforts to reconcile with England and the signing of the "Pact of Steel', and, all things considered, he did not have one even after that, even when he decided to enter the war. As far as the early period is concerned, we do not think we are wrong in saying that, in his particular political view, military problems never had their own 'autonomy' and specific raison d'être, but were seen and treated by him as aspects, components, and subordinates of other problems, that of 'power' at the beginning and that of the regime later on, the economic and financial issues, Italy's image abroad and support for foreign policy, etc. These were not only issues that were more congenial to him, but which he considered to be the real decisive issues, compared to which strictly military issues would have had no real relevance, given that the solutions would always have been political, or would have been addressed 'at the appropriate time and place' and in the particular forms most suited to the political context in which Italy was at war, he wrote to Mussolini to remind him of 'the promise made to me, in the recent meeting granted to me, not to leave me unemployed at this solemn time for the Fatherland' and to say that he was 'always ready for any mission that Your Excellency might entrust to me' (L. E. Longo, Francesco Saverio Grazioli cit., pp. 448ff.). See R. Oraziani, Ho difeso la patria, Milan 1950, pp. 375ff., which reproduces with minor variations the notes (dated September 20, 1943) from Graziani's 1943 diary (ACS, R. Graziami, b. 65, fase. 47, sottofasc. 6). The news was confirmed by Grazioli at the Graziani Trial, Rome 1950, III, pp. 1007 ff. the military instrument should have been used. Eloquent proof of the subordination of military policy toMussolini's opinion is provided by the fact that, except for a single year, from the end of 1928 to the end of 1929, a period in which the three ministries were personally run by Mussolini, the composition of the Grand Council never included the heads of the military ministries (Balbo, when he was Minister of Aviation, from 1929 to 1933, was a member not in this capacity but as one of the Quadrumvirs), while those of foreign affairs, internal affairs, justice, finance, national education, corporations, and agriculture and forestry were members. From this perspective, it is not surprising that in the 1920s and early 1930s, Mussolini's real attention to military issues was limited and focused mainly on those that had or could have more or less immediate political implications, i.e., those we have already discussed in the first part of this chapter. A reading of the minutes of the sessions of the Supreme Defense Commission during those years is indicative of his approach to these issues. The picture that emerges is of a Mussolini who diligently participates in the work of the commission, summarizes the discussions and concludes them, sometimes reserving the right to decide at a later date and to have the issues studied further, but who moves cautiously, keeping his interventions almost always at a general level and mediating between the various theses on the table, with the clear intention of not upsetting anyone and avoiding the emergence of more thorny problems and financial commitments. The picture that emerges from his relations with the heads of the military departments is no different, at least as documented mainly by the summary notes that Gazzera jotted down for his own memory immediately after each audience or meeting with Mussolini. With them, Mussolini, in keeping with his temperament and his desire to know, control, and decide everything personally, was less cautious, entering into a whole series of particular problems and issues, often minute and

insignificant, letting himself go with personal considerations and enunciating some of his "theories" of government; sometimes he paused to explain to them his assessments of the international situation and his predictions regarding its developments and, more rarely, he informed them of some diplomatic background that was close to his heart; However, he was also very cautious with them on issues involving fundamental choices and significant financial commitments. In terms of possible prospects for war, for example, he never went beyond the hypothesis, already put forward for study in July 1927 to Badoglio and the three chiefs of staff, of a conflict with Yugoslavia, with France not directly involved but certainly hostile to Italy, and he granted only very partial and limited resources to the requests made of him. Suffice it to say that military expenditure (which in 1913-14 had accounted for 36.4% of the budget) was reduced to 28.4% in 1927-28.Italy, and he granted only very partially and sparingly the resources requested of him. Suffice it to say that military expenditure (which in 1913-14 had accounted for 36.43 percent of the budget) in the period 1923-31, when Mussolini believed that the military could, as the Undersecretary for Aeronautics mentioned, lead to a 'modus vivendi', as was the case with a tacit truce in the trenches at certain times of the day during the last war. Clearly, cities cannot be defended, and the experiments in Lyon and Toulon are conclusive in this regard. However, certain political and moral centers, which are the nerve centers of the nation, cannot be left undefended. It is a question of ultimately a question of proportioning the allocation of funds for these various forms of defense, grading them according to their importance" (ibid., Supreme Defense Commission, b. 12, Minutes of Sessions I-X (2923-33), Minutes of the session of February 10-11, 1931, pp. 189-91). To Gazzera, who in the summer of 1931 discussed with him the thorny problem of propaganda in the army, he replied curtly: "remember that even the Eternal Father has bells rung for him," and declared himself in favor of holding conferences for officers on the works and laws of the regime; as for the soldiers, however, "they have no need: they come from the atmosphere and return to it" (in the Gazzera Archive). Both decisions were based on his firm conviction that public opinion did not exist at the mass level and could be determined at will ("public opinion does not exist: I create it with my speeches and with the press," he would later say in Soddu). What mattered was to shape those "300-400 thousand people, no more" who, "after all," govern every nation (aussme, Supreme Defense Commission, b. 46, Minutes of the XV Session (February 3-9, 1938), f. 14). On December 23, 1930, Mussolini, referring to the Grandi-Litvinov meeting a month earlier, said to Gazzera: "Russia even wants to sign an alliance pact with us. This was not possible for two reasons: first, so as not to further disturb world opinion; second, because in 1926, at Badoglio's instigation (monument to him in Kiscinev), a five-year alliance treaty was signed with Romania. Being with Romania, we cannot make pacts with Russia" (in the Gazzera Archive). See l. ceva, 1927. A meeting between Mussolini and military leaders, in "Il politico," June 1985, pp. 329 ff. All reports on the "Overall efficiency of theArmy" written by Gazzera from January 1929 to July 1933 have as their only real hypothesis a conflict with Yugoslavia and possibly also with France (in the Gazzera Archive). still posed a problem, hovering around 31.70 percent, in the following four-year period 1931-35 they fell to 25.03 percent. And not only because of the difficult economic situation. For almost five years, Gazzera, who had already been appointed undersecretary in

1928, had requested an increase in ordinary budget funds and an extraordinary allocation of eight billion divided into as few annual payments as possible to bring the balanced strength of the Army from 220,000 to 260,000 men (in 1914-15 it was 275,000) and the divisions that could be mobilized to forty in order to rebalance the unfavorable balance of power with France and Yugoslavia, had responded above all with a series of considerations on the difficulties of the economicand financial situation and political forecasts on developments in the international arena, of which he was undoubtedly convinced, but which, equally undoubtedly, served to dismiss or significantly scale back the requests submitted to him. There will be war, he told him on August 7, 1929, when Germany has reorganized itself. Three problems: evacuation of the Rhineland; the Danzig corridor; the Anschluss. Until 1935-1936, we will grit our teeth, but there will be no war between the great powers. Italy cannot make any further financial efforts this year. He expressed himself in the same vein on January 27, 1931: In 1932, there will be a political conference on disarmament. Nothing will be concluded. 1933: nervousness; 1934-1935-1936: evacuation of the Saar, the rise of the right wing to power in Germany, Russia ready. It will be a turbulent period that could even lead to war. We must be ready. And on July 8 of the same year, he reiterated: "We need five or six years of tranquility." However, by tranquility, rather than the time necessary for serious preparation, he meant above all the time available before actually having to face the problem. So Gazzera, who, as we have said, wanted an allocation of eight billion in extraordinary funds and an annual increase in ordinary funds ranging from a minimum of 190 million to a maximum of 411,500, after repeated requests and broken promises and gradual reductions, in practice he only managed to obtain the allocation of 2,800 million in extraordinary funds spread over the financial years 1930-38 and nothing in ordinary funds, which, on the contrary, suffered reductions in some financial years. However, this did not prevent Gazzera from bringing the force to 245,000 men in mid-July 1933 (despite the budget only providing for 22,000) and the divisions that could be mobilized to the 40 desired, despite the fact that the budget only provided for 20. the force to 245,000 men (despite the budget providing for only 22,000) and the divisions that could be mobilized to the desired forty (two years ahead of the date set out in the program he had drawn up in 1929). To achieve these results, of course, significant choices and sacrifices had to be made in various areas (renewal of weapons and ammunition, establishment of advanced warehouses and central depots, stockpiling of weapons and equipment for the creation of other divisions, etc.), the consequences of which would inevitably felt in subsequent years. At the time, however, they not only satisfied Mussolini, but also confirmed his course of action: if, after asking in vain for so many funds, the military had achieved these results, it meant that he must have thought that their requests and the timescales they had envisaged were excessive and that, therefore, he was right to keep them in check and scale back their demands. Things did not change even during Baistrocchi's administration and, essentially, not even during most of Pariani's. Although the international political horizon was gradually darkening, Baistrocchi received no indication from Mussolini, even of a preliminary nature, about Italy's possible prospects for war so that he could prepare the relevant war plans (so much so , in Baistrocchi's own words, he had to act mainly on the basis of 'unforeseen contingencies') and take them into

account when deciding on the type of army to be prepared. He therefore ended up devoting himself essentially to improving the Army's offensive capabilities (focusing in particular on the motorization of some fifteen divisions to be completed by 1937), without, however, given the scarcity of financial resources, being able to address very important issues such as the renewal of the artillery (which could only be undertaken towards the end of 1938 by Pariani) and the establishment of large armored units. Mussolini took the same line with the heads of the Navy and Air Force. For the latterthe latter, General Valle (undersecretary and chief of staff from November 1933 to October 1939) gave testimony years ago that essentially confirms that of Baistrocchi: Not even Mussolini [like Badoglio], before 1939, ever gave me strategic directives to guide the preparation of the armed forces. In other words, before 1939, no one had told me whether I should prepare the air force for an air and sea war against France and England or for a continental conflict against Germany. Nor should this come as too much of a surprise. Given his foreign policy, Mussolini was unable to give precise instructions and, in any case, he must have thought he still had time to do so, just as he must have thought he still had time before he really had to face the problem of restructuring the economy in view of the "inevitable" war he was talking about more and more often, but which, deep down, he must not have wanted and which, in any case, he thought he could avoid with his political skill and, at worst, postpone it, as far as Italy was concerned, for several more years. As for the Army (and, to a lesser extent, the Air Force), its preparation and modernization, the war in Ethiopia and then the war in Spain dealt a severe blow, both because of the mobilization resources they absorbed and because their economic cost was such that it almost completely blocked any possibility of modernization and development until August 1938. In fact, the replenishment of depleted supplies absorbed the extraordinary allocations for the financial years up to 1938-39, obtained at the time by Gazzera. For his part, Mussolini, faced with the development programs drawn up or being drawn up by the three branches of the armed forces as a result of the war in, took precautions against further requests by having the undersecretaries in charge of the three military ministries sign a commitment in August 1936 not to request changes to their budgets until June 1938. He decided that for the time being, priority should be given to 'making the Navy efficient"; then ("I hope to be able to do this by 1938") he would think about the Army and Air Force. A note "on military expenditure," dated November 16, 1936, in which the state accountant general Ettore Cambi summarized to the Minister of Finance Thaon di Revel the actual trend in military expenditure in the three-year period 1934-35 to 1936-37, the requests received to date from the Ministries of War, Navy, Air Force, and Colonies (for military expenditures under their jurisdiction), commitments already made and their impact and compatibility with the financial possibilities of the treasury, helps to understand why Mussolini had to resort to such an abnormal precautionary procedure and avoided even more than usual making specific commitments for the future, despite the fact that, at this point, he too must have realized the need to take the concerns and requests of the military seriously. Even though he did not consider a European conflict imminent and thought he could keep Italy out of it until around 1943, continuing to skimp on resources for the armed forces was too risky. But after all that Ethiopia had absorbed and Spain was absorbing, there were very few resources left. there were very few... According to the

calculations of the State General Accounting Office, in 1933-34, expenses, after deducting purely accounting compensation items, amounted to 4,667 million (Army 2,614, Navy 1,362, Air Force 691), equal to 26 percent of the treasury's resources. In the following three financial years, they amounted to 4,409, 5,096, and 5,119 million. However, to these normal expenses had to be added the extraordinary expenses for Ethiopia: 971 million for 1934-35, 11,122 million for 1935-36 and 634 million for 1936-37, as well as the "still undetermined" costs for Spain and a series of other expenses relating to the Navy and Air Force and weighing on the 1936-37 financial year, amounting to approximately 500 million. Finally, as regards the normal budgets of the three military ministries for 1937-38, the requests already made amounted to 6,201 million (War 3,052, Navy 1,949, Air Force 1,200), 2,600 of which had already been granted on an extraordinary basis. This figure, if the requests had been accepted, would have represented 33.4 per cent of the total expected revenue and even more, given that it did not include the military part of the budget of the Ministry of Colonies, estimated at around 406 million. And that is without mentioning the 1,200 million increase in interest on public debt and the forecast of further increases in the budgets following that of *37-382. It was therefore logical that Mussolini felt it necessary both to contain military expenditure and to establish priorities which, given his mentality and modus operandi, could not fail to be determined by considerations of a political rather than a technical nature. Hence his choice in favor of the Navy, while scaling back its programs, not only to reduce costs, but also to reaffirm his authority and not to dissatisfy the other branches of the armed forces too much, but rather to appease them, as they were being kept on a tight leash for the time being. Typical in this sense is the story of the aircraft carriers, repeatedly requested by the Navy and always refused by Mussolini, who went so far as to induce Admiral Cavagnari to publicly renounce them on March 15, 1938, in the Chamber of Deputies. This story can be explained by a tangle of reasons: Mussolini's ignorance on the subject, his desire to save money and not give in to "the admirals," and the Air Force's hostility to the idea of the Navy invading its field. In favor of the priority given to the "efficiency" of the Navy was supported by a series of reasons typical of Mussolini's modus operandi. On a subjective level, so to speak, but probably also to some extent "political" (in terms of policy towards the military), there were the merits that 1 In the extraordinary expenses for Ethiopia, the State General Accounting Office calculated, in addition to those of the three military ministries, those of a military nature charged to the ministries of Colonies and the Interior. The details 2 In the 1938-39 budget, for example, 500 million would have been charged to the Ministry of War and 1,200 million to the Ministry of Aeronautics, in addition to the allocations already granted. The Navy, in the person of Cavagnari in particular, had won the favor of the "Duce" by taking a clear position in favor of the Ethiopian enterprise when Badoglio and Baistrocchi, i.e., the Army, were still opposed to it. Added to this first reason was the objective fact that the Ethiopian conflict had brought to the fore the need for a Navy capable of taking on the tasks arising from the new political and strategic situation it had created and, more generally, from Mussolini's increasingly Mediterranean-focused policy. Until 1935, the Navy, like the Army, had essentially considered only one war scenario, that of a conflict with France and Yugoslavia, with England remaining neutral. Now that this scenario had been shattered, at least for the

moment, the traditional Italian-English friendship had been shattered, this scenario had to be replaced with another, much more challenging one. In a lengthy secret memorandum dated June 25, 1936, drawn up by the Ministry of the Navy to present to the "clairvoyance of the supreme Judge," i.e., Mussolini, the need to focus attention and financial commitment not only on the "development of naval forces" but also on the creation of a "system of operational and logistical bases" appropriate to the new reality, we read this analysis, which we have every reason to believe was shared by Mussolini, even though, at that time, he considered the crisis in relations with London to be remediable and even thought, as we saw in the previous volume, of a "general agreement" with England: The sudden Italian-British conflict that arose in the spring of 1935 and its current development, projected into the near or distant future, radically changes the facts of our geographical-strategic problem. It is well known that in the previously prominent hypothesis of an Italian-French conflict, with England remaining neutral, France has a considerable geographical-strategic advantage in the western Mediterranean, while we have a similar advantage in the eastern part of this sea. The respective positions in the central Mediterranean are almost equivalent, and consequently the so-called Strait of Sicily could become a field of intense conflict between the two navies. In the event of war against the British Empire, however, and even more so if France were to ally itself with it, the privileged position we enjoy in the east would be nullified and overwhelmed by the numerous possibilities that England finds in this area and will find even more if it decides to establish a real naval base in Cyprus. The developments of such a conflict make it easy to predict that, even if Turkey, Greece, and Egypt were neutral, it would not be difficult or unlikely for England to base its naval forces in the ports of those states, which could always appear to be victims of a violent occupation, against which they do not have sufficient forces to oppose. This second reason was so closely linked to a third, international political reason that it almost merged with it, bringing us back to to the Duce's plans to mend relations with England and reach a "general agreement" with it. In Mussolini's logic, in order to achieve these goalsthe decisive factor had to be London's interest in preventing the crisis in its relations with Rome from leading Mussolini to come to an agreement with Berlin. For this deterrent to be successful, however, Italy had to pose a real military threat to England, and this could only happen if the Italian fleet was able to stand up to the English fleet in the Mediterranean, controlling it to the point of making it unusable as a short route to theEast and allowing the explosion of more or less latent anti-British tendencies in the Arab world and India. Finally, a fourth reason was that the renewal and strengthening of the Navy had been under consideration for years and, in part, had already been initiated before the Ethiopian conflict. At the end of the 1915-18 war, the Navy had a large number of outdated or technically obsolete ships; of sixteen battleships, only five were partially serviceable, and the same could be said for the cruisers; the situation was slightly better for light vessels. In the following quarter, therefore, the approach of enemy aircraft carriersin this area. However, anti-aircraft defense would be actively ensured not only by the so-called passive defenses set up on the inner arc, but also by the airfields of Nisida Capodichino Capua Nettuno Rome area Cerveteri Furbara Orbetello Terranova Elmas Stagnoni Trapani). Lake Paola could become a base for seaplanes for immediate use, being sufficiently distant from the fleet's anchorage. While in

the political and governmental sphere a policy of drastic reduction in expenditure and less efficient units had been pursued, the emergence of the Adriatic question (in response to which theArmy and Navy took different stances) and, later, the "naval parity" (in terms of battleships and aircraft carriers) with France, ratified by the Washington Conference on arms limitation, had aroused widespread discontent among the Navy leadership (in whose opinion France had taken the place that Austria-Hungary had held until 1915) over the Navy's lack of efficiency and the government's "insensitivity" to this problem. TheThe rise to power of fascism did not change the substance of the situation. In January 1923, Thaon di Revel presented his program for restoring the Navy's efficiency to the Council of Ministers, and Mussolini formally accepted it. However, given the financial difficulties of the moment and the uncertainties and differences of opinion that existed among the Navy leadership itself regarding the type of fleet best suited to face the new reality that had arisen with the of submarines and aircraft on a large scale, everything had been reduced in practice to a sort of freeze on the status quo: waiting for better times and the end of the "naval holiday" sanctioned in Washington, units in such a condition that it was uneconomical to restore them to working order were decommissioned, new construction was limited almost exclusively to replacements for those that were gradually becoming over-age, and, as for the budget, for several years it did not exceed the pre-war level in relation to the value of the lira. Until 1927-28, this situation remained virtually unchanged, to Mussolini's complete satisfaction. Not only because it did not weigh excessively from a financial point of view, but also because the "Duce," on the one hand, "wanted to reserve maximum freedom of decision' and wanted to avoid initiatives that could set in motion an arms race (with France) that he could not sustain, and on the other hand, he had ideas on the subject (partly shared by many fascists, partly the result of thethe influence that Costanzo Ciano had on him in this field) that he knew to be different from those prevailing at the top of the Navy: he was convinced that battleships had had their day, he did not believe that Italy, given its geographical location, needed aircraft carriers, and instead attributed "paramount importance" to small, high-speed cruisers, submarines, and MAS boats. In the second half of 1927, the Navy took a first step towards putting its development on the agenda by preparing a memorandum on the "Fundamentals of Naval Policy," drafted by Rear Admiral R. Bernotti. This was forwarded by Sirianni to Mussolini, who approved it in principle, albeit with some significant reservations. Having overcome the uncertainties and differences of opinion of previous years and taking advantage of the possibilities offered by the Washington Treaty (and, in perspective, by the expiry of the 'naval vacation'), the Navy had succeeded in gaining acceptance for the principle that, faced with the objective need to divide units into two categories according to their efficiency and to gradually decommission those assigned to the second category that could no longer provide a useful service in relation to maintenance and operating costs (in 1928, three battleships and eight submarines were decommissioned and the decommissioning of numerous scouts, destroyers, and torpedo boats was planned), maintenance and operating costs (in 1928, three battleships and eight submarines were decommissioned, and the decommissioning of numerous scouts, destroyers, and torpedo boats was planned), it was equally necessary to "urgently provide for studies and deliberations relating to the naval program." This resulted

inthe following year, a detailed program of renewal and gradual development over five-year periods was drawn up, which took into account, to a large extent (medium and light vessels and submarines), the views and requests of the Navy. Mussolini had dug his heels in on the issue of aircraft carriers and, initially, battleships. Because, in 1933, he was persuaded to take the first step towards the construction of the latter, it took the French decision, the year before, to undertake the construction of the battle cruisers Dunkerque and Strasbourg: only in the face of this new development did Mussolini authorize the transformation and modernization of the two old battleships Giulio Cesare and Cavour, which had already been decommissioned in 1928. The second step was taken thethe following year with the start of construction of the first two battleships of the Littorio class. From 1930 to 1935, approximately 400 million lire per year were allocated for new construction. As Minniti rightly observed, until 1934-35, the Navy's programs, in short, did not go substantially beyond the normal replacement of units. It was only in 1936-37 that the real strengthening began, with the aim of improving the balance of power with the British fleet. The first signs of this intention had already been seen in 1934. However, it was only the war inmade it possible, albeit to a considerably lesser extent than the Navy would have liked. Between 1935 and 1936, the Navy had studied a series of multi-year programs (until 1940 and 1942) which, if accepted, would have almost doubled its strength and, in the most favorable and ambitious case, would have provided for the preparation of a fleet equal to two-thirds of the British one, capable not only of "maintaining security in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea," but also of operating "in the oceans" in "cooperation with oceanic operations of any allied navies.". By the end of 1935, however, these ambitious projects had already foundered. Mussolini, in fact, while agreeing to "streamline" the Navy, was not willing to either deplete the state's finances or engage in a race to the bitter end for naval rearmament, which he would inevitably lose and which would jeopardize his plans to negotiate a "general agreement" with London. nor, finally, to postpone the strengthening of the Army and Air Force for too long, especially since, while the Navy seemed necessary to push England towards an agreement, the Army and Air Force were needed to make the agreement itself credible and attractive to the British in its anti-German aspect. For the two-year period 1936-38, the Navy thus had, initially (1936), only funds to build 12 destroyers, 16 torpedo boats, 20 submarines, and 25 MAS (while it had to give up not only the first of the three aircraft carriers it aspired to, but also two new Garibaldi-class cruisers) and, subsequently (1937), the modernization of the Doria and the Duilio and the construction of two more Littorio-class battleships and 12 scouts to be built in four years (at a cost of 450 million per year for five years). This was much less than it would have liked, but enough to enable it to claim, in later times, and especially during the numerous controversies that arose after World War II over the responsibilities of fascism and the various branches of the armed forces for the lack of preparation with which the conflict had been faced, a greater sense of responsibility and a greater ability to prepare, and to induce even serious and well-informed scholars to contrast the 'timely and organic preparation' of the Navy with the 'timely but disorganized' preparation of the Air Force and the 'lack of preparation' of the Army. In reality, the degree of preparation (apart, of course, from the aspects of training and doctrine of use, which are a completely different matter and on which the available

historical literature is very scarce and too indulgent) that distinguished the various armed forces at the time of Italy's intervention in the conflict can only very partially help us to formulate a judgment on their respective capabilities and, even less, on their sense of responsibility. In historical terms, the points of reference for a serious discussion of the preparedness of the armed forces must be above all others: on the one hand, the ups and downs of Mussolini's foreign policy, with its uncertainties and concerns ("current' and for the post-war future), on the other hand, the capabilities of industry (both in terms of production and technology and in terms of the possibility of obtaining the necessary raw materials) and, more generally, the Italian economy's ability to cope with the commitment of an inter-European conflict and, on yet another side, the domestic political considerations that the prospect of such a commitment aroused in Mussolini. Even in the absence of directives or precise indications from Mussolini on the objectives and outcomes of his policy, the Navy, within the limits of the funds granted to it, was able to proceed with its preparations without serious problems or uncertainties: for it, the adversary to be taken into consideration could only be France and, above all, England, and the most important theater of war could only be the Mediterranean. Everything pointed in this direction, and in addition, there were the repeated public statements that Mussolini had been making since 1936 about the Mediterranean being a a "matter of life" for Italy. Its situation was therefore, so to speak, the easiest; for this reason, it is precisely the Navy's preparations that deserve the most severe criticism, in particular for not having taken into account in good time the need to ensure communications between Italy and Libya. Compared to the Navy, the Air Force and, above all, the Army were in a much more disadvantaged position: even aside from the issue of their "efficiency," which was similar to that of the Navy, the lack of precise directives and a series of contradictory instructions (such as Mussolini's orders to fortify the Brenner Pass border and to render ineffective, but not denounced, the military agreements of ^5 with France and his recurring anti-Greek and anti-Yugoslav outbursts) made it difficult for them to prepare for an enemy and theaters of war that were not clearly defined. Not to mention the even more serious fact that the 'efficiency' of the Army (and, in part, also of the Air Force), conditioned as it wasby the vicissitudes of Mussolini's foreign policy and German initiatives, inevitably suffered all the repercussions, both in terms of the economic resources available and the assessment of the time presumably available, and in terms of the possibility of preparing plans appropriate to a situation and fronts that, depending on the political and diplomatic moment, Mussolini considered differently for the purposes of his political strategy. Typical in the fluctuating repercussions that international events from July 1938 onwards had on the army's preparations: the first Czechoslovak crisis, the Munich Agreement, second Czechoslovak crisis, conclusion of the "Pact of Steel," and the Danzig crisis. The first Czechoslovak crisis prompted Mussolini to begin "streamlining" the army: Pariani, who had initially requested fifteen billion lire, then reduced to ten and then (with the "Duceconsidered the request still too burdensome) to five in four financial years, had five billion in extraordinary funds starting from the 1939-40 financial year. However, the conclusion of the Munich Agreement led Mussolini to believe that the possibility of a conflict with England no longer existed and that even with regard to France it had greatly diminished and, therefore, to take his foot off the accelerator and put it

on the brake: in the final draft of the budget, the five billion initially agreed upon for five financial years was spread over ten. The second Czechoslovak crisis, however, brought his foot back on the accelerator: in April 1939, the army was allocated another five billion spread over five financial years. Except that, once the 'Pact of Steel' and feeling once again more confident that there would be no talk of conflict for at least three or four years, he was able to return to considering the whole problem with a more relaxed mind and timeframe. So, ultimately, while it would be an exaggeration to say that Mussolini did not really care about the development of the army until the outbreak of World War II in September 1939, it is a fact that until then, despite its ups and downs, never seemed so urgent and essential to him that he felt he had to tackle it systematically with all the means at his disposal and with absolute priority over any other. There is no reason to believe that he was not sincere when, for example, on May 8, 1939, at a meeting of the Army Council, he said: "The problem of artillery is of fundamental importance: it keeps me awake at night. We have artillery from 20 years ago. And, what is more serious, production is deficient. While the Hungarians produce 100 guns per month, the French 600, the Germans 1,000, we produce only 65. I am referring, of course, to calibers greater than 70 mm. We must be able to produce 200 guns per month, and if possible 300, with the relative ammunition: then we will be safe. It will take about two years: we will have the first medium and large caliber guns (I am talking about calibers up to 210 mm) in 1941-42. Historically, what is at issue and needs to be understood and highlighted is not so much the sincerity or otherwise of certain statements he made (such as the one just mentioned or others made later to make people believe that he was taken by surprise when he learned of the Army's lack of preparedness and even deceived about it) as his modus operandi and the contradictions it created both in terms of the use of the objective and potential possibilities of the national economy and industry, and the specific preparation of the Army, precisely because it was the most economically burdensome and consequential item that should have been rigorously addressed.and potential of the national economy and industry, and in terms of the specific preparation of the army, which, precisely because it was the most economically burdensome item and the one with the most serious consequences, should have taken precedence over everything else, if, in Mussolini's political vision and modus operandi, the role of the army had not been, all things considered, the least 'political', the one that would have gained importance last, when politics had exhausted all its possibilities and finally set the tasks and objectives to be entrusted to the armed forces. Hence not only the priority given to the 'efficiency' of the Navy and, substantially, also of the Air Force, considered by Mussolini to be weapons of much greater political support than theArmy, but also his broad assessment of the commitments for the preparation of the Army according to political circumstances and his reluctance to give precise instructions not only on strategic objectives, but even on what he considered would be Italy's adversaries in a future conflict. With all the direct and indirect consequences, immediate and potential consequences for military preparation that are easy to imagine. To make this situation even more precarious was Badoglio, who, for his part, did little or nothing to remedy the consequences of Mussolini's attitude. On some occasions (a typical case being the occupation of Albania), the Chief of Staff was kept in the dark about what was being prepared; but apart from these cases, he limited his interventions to a

minimum and, if he did intervene, it was mostly to try to block what was being prepared. 6. the man who could have tried to persuade the 'Duce' to take a different approach to military matters. Suffice it to say that on November 18, 1939, introducing the proceedings of the first meeting of the chiefs of staff after the start of the conflict, he said: "I warmly thank His Excellency Soddu for the measures he has proposed to the Duce in preparation for war: they fully correspond to all my hopes for the strengthening of the Army. Preparation and robustness of the cadres were our greatest deficiencies. The Head of Government told me that what should have been done was often taken for granted. This must not happen again. His Excellency the Head of Government must be kept fully informed, day by day, of the state of our armed forces. Let us proceed, therefore, in our preparatory work, comforted by the thought that we are fortunate to have the Duce as Head of the Armed Forces, the Duce who denies us nothing. We must provide for the real preparation of the Armed Forces without political discussions: whether or not there is war, whether it is in the east or the west, that is not our task. I remember General Morra's speech in Gaeta, to His Excellency Salandra, before the war: "If you order us to stand still, we will stand still; if you order us to march, we will march, confident and calm, always following the orders of the Government." His attitude towards the basic strategic guidelines that Pariani had been trying to outline since the end of 1936 and the beginning of 1937 was typical, partly based on his own assessment of the situation and the outcomes of Mussolini's policy, and partly in order to make more rational use of the resources that would be allocated to 'streamlining' of the army. Pariani was certainly not without responsibility, but it is a fact that his management of the army had to contend with difficulties and objective limitations that none of the other chiefs of staff probably encountered, just as it is a fact that he was destined to become a sort of scapegoat even for responsibilities that did not fall within his remit. Equally certain, as has been rightly observed, he lacked neither brilliant insights, modern ideas, nor the ability to formulate far-reaching projects. As far as we are concerned here, he was convinced that the war would be fought alongside Germany and against France and Englandand that, for Italy, the decisive front would be in Cyrenaica, even though, knowing Mussolini well and having been one of the protagonists of his eastern policy for years, he did not rule out the possibility that a "policy of development" towards the Danube-Balkan basin could be implemented in Europe. As he would say to Ciano on February 14, 1938, the war would be "lightning fast and a surprise' and 'will be won in Suez and Paris'. The war in Ethiopia had brought 'the Mediterranean war' to the forefront. The Alpine barrier would constitute more than a battlefield "an insurmountable dividing obstacle" between Italy and France, so that the decisive battle would take place in the Mediterranean and in Egypt-Sudan. This premise, he wrote to General Rosi on February 9, 1937, fortunately allows us to further emphasize our theory of rapid decision warfare, because it tends to develop that part of the army which, due to its lightness, flexibility, and momentum, is best suited to be deployed in theaters of operation outside the national territory. Consistent with this conviction (to which we owe in large part his much-discussed and criticized choice in favor of the binary division, which he considered more suitable than the ternary division for operating in the particular circumstances of the precautionary mobilization of February-March 1939 and, above all, in the autumn of 1938; the controversy over the binary division; the failure to

resolve the issue of promotions inherited from Baistrocchi, whose law on promotion had given rise to complaints, grievances, and widespread discontent; the difference of opinion with Badoglio (and, ultimately, with Mussolini) regarding the need to prepare, at least in principleoffensive war plans for both North Africa and the Balkans; accusations of excessive "optimism," "inconsistency of criteria," and failure to create an army capable of meeting the needs of the "rapid war" he had theorized. For many of these criticisms, see L. Ceva, Un intervento ai Badoglio cit., pp. 159 ff. A long critical study, almost certainly the work of E. Canevari, sent to Mussolini by Farinacci on October 14, 1939 (ACS, Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ris. (192 2-43), fase. 2 4 2/R, "R. Farinacci," sottofasc. 3 9) and which should be linked to the aforementioned letter from Farinacci to Mussolini dated 13 September, in which, among other things, he strongly argued the need to divide the offices of undersecretary and chief of staff and to appoint "a true chief of S. M. general" with effective command powers over the three armed forces and who was not, like Badoglio, "a mere advisory body in a personal capacity". However much these reasons may have weighed in the balance, Pariani's dismissal was essentially due to his "enthusiastic" attitude towards Germany and in favor of Italy's entry into the war on its side (which turned Ciano against him) and Mussolini's need to find a scapegoat on whom to place the blame for the army's state of unpreparedness. See D. Ferrari, Dalla divisione ternaria alla binaria: una pagina di storia dell'Esercito italiano, in "Memorie storiche militari," 1982, p. 61. The War Ministry hypothesized three possible conflicts at the beginning of 1937: Italy and Germany against England, France, and the USSR; Italy against England; Italy against England and many of the Mediterranean coastal states (AUSSME, Supreme Defense Commission, b. 45, XIV Session (February 1-11, 1937)). See G. Ciano, Diario 1937-43, edited by R. De Felice, Milan 1980, p. 98. MRSCM, Carte Pariani, "Ordini verbali nel periodo 1937-39" (Verbal orders in the period 1937-39), sub data. tactical and logistical conditions in Africa), shortly after assuming the positions of undersecretary and chief of staff of the Army on November 18, 1936, he had given instructions for the resumption and refinement of the studies prepared during the Ethiopian conflict for possible action against the British in Egypt and Sudan. This possibility was discussed in the following months at the 14th session of the Supreme Defense Commission (February 1937), during which two positions emerged: that of Pariani, for whomEthiopia and, above all, Cyrenaica were decisive for controlling the Suez Canal, and that of Badoglio, who believed it was rather difficult and premature to specify the military function of the overseas territories and who suggested that, in the event of conflict, these would constitute a defensive burden rather than fronts to be exploited strategically, while what really mattered was "closing the doors of the house," after which only then could one think of going on the offensive. Discussed again at the next session of the Supreme Defense Commission (February 1938), the issue did not move in any direction. To break the deadlock, but only apparently, it would take the first Czechoslovak crisis. Under its impact, at the end of October 1938, Badoglio was in fact induced to ask Balbo, who was in command of the armed forces in North Africa, for an operational plan for Libya. Once he had received the plan, which was based on a defensive strategy in the west and an offensive strategy in the east, on Suez-Alexandria, it was essentially rejected by Badoglio and, for the time being, by Pariani himself, who considered Balbo's concerns about the limited forces available to be

well-founded, and above all because, in the meantime, Mussolini had come to the conclusion that a conflict with England was out of the question and that, in the event of a conflict with France, it would be France that would take the initiative, so Badoglio had an easy time arguing that the entire plan for Libya should be defensive and, in any case, "directed towards the west." Nor did the outbreak of World War II the following year change this approach: Balbo's plan was dusted off, but in an entirely defensive version, in which the possibility of "offensive operations" was reduced to the case "that exceptionally favorable circumstances arise." The same can be said for the entire period of "non-belligerence' period, during which Mussolini, partly because he was confident that he could avoid entering the war for the time being, if not actually bring the belligerents to the negotiating table with his political skills, and partly so as not to compromise his position in any way, was careful not to take or authorize any initiative aimed at preparing offensive strategic plans. Badoglio, to quote General Faldella, "limited himself to insisting on the need to 'close the doors of the house' and absolutely ruled out formulating, or even studying, strategic plans that went beyond this need, which, although immediate, was not the only one." This attitude would prove to have serious negative consequences and, in a man with absolutely no military training such as Mussolini, it may, at a pinch, be understandable, but it is absolutely unjustifiable in Badoglio; and against which Pariani had argued since January 1939, when, in disagreement with the Chief of Staff, but also implicitly with Mussolini, he had insisted on the need to define an offensive plan, because a defensive strategy would solve nothing: What matters is how we intend to resolve the war... with a defensive strategy, we risk suffering defeats. We must fight offensively at one point. For the purposes of effective military preparation, 'streamlining' the armed forces was only one aspect, undoubtedly important, but ultimately not decisive for the problem, just as the financial aspect was also secondary, since, at least in theory, the lack of hard currency with which to purchase, where and when possible, the necessary raw materials could always be compensated for (as well as, of course, by resorting to autarkic substitutes and surrogates and bysupplies from friendly and allied countries), by seizing territories rich in such raw materials from the outset of the conflict. The truly essential aspect of the problem was to put the national economy, and industry in particular, in a position to cope not only with the "efficiency" of the armed forces so that they could go to war, but also and above all with the demands of a prolonged inter-European conflict. Various aspects of the problem more specifically related to war production, and in particular its organization and control by ad hoc military bodies from 1922 to 1943, have been the subject ofthe last decade of research and studies, which now allow us to focus on this issue in a more historically satisfactory way than was previously possible on the basis of the reconstruction made in the immediate post-war period with largely self-defensive intentions (both from a personal point of view and in terms of the actions of the military hierarchy) by General Carlo Favagrossa, who presided over this task from September 1939. Among these studies, the most valuable are certainly those by Minniti; it is thanks to them that our knowledge of the subject has been greatly enriched and clarified and, at least in part, freed from conflicting polemical influences. Thanks to his political sensitivity, his careful observation of the transformations that took place in Europe with the 1914-18 war, and his extensive, albeit disordered,

reading on the events of the conflict and the problems it raised in every sector of society, Mussolini had set himself, from the first weeks after coming to power, the problem of the use and organization of all national resources and activities in view of a new conflict, which he considered inevitable, even if not in the very short term. And he had posed it, as Minniti noted, in terms that testify to "a truly anticipatory vision of the inexorable mechanisms of future war' and of the need to make civil and industrial mobilization economically and politically inseparable. Significant in this regard is what he wrote to Minister Oviglio on September 5, 1924, during the preparatory phase of the following year's law on the 'organization of the nation for war," he wrote to Minister Oviglio: We have seen the civilian population contribute to the war even if they did not take up arms, manufacturing the materials necessary for the forces on the front line and limiting their consumption so that the country's resistance would last longer. And the conditions in which this war was fought, with control of the sea and financial resources for supplies from abroad that cannot be guaranteed every time, will almost certainly be worse in a future war; the industrial effort will have to be much greater and accompanied by agricultural and mining production, as well as severe consumption restrictions. Nor was the civilian population spared from enemy attacks; aerial bombardments of inland cities, railway junctions, etc. have revealed a whole range of possibilities for the air force in terms of cutting the nation's nerves behind the battle lines and thus hastening the victorious end of the war. Sinceit is now generally accepted that the entire population contributes to defense and offense through its work, military actions against the nerve centers of the country can no longer be classified as illegal; resistance to such actions must be organized, in other words, the country must also be given a corresponding discipline, albeit in a different form, to the discipline of the troops on the front line. In line with this vision, Mussolini had been working since January 1923 to set up a body to oversee 'the most important issues concerning the preparation and organization of the various national activities and the means necessary for war'. However, the management of this body, the Committee for Civil Mobilization, linked to the Supreme Defense Commission, had been not only long and laborious, but also only partially in line with his intentions, even though the 'Duce' had not considered it politically expedient to reveal this in order not to upset his relations with the military establishment, which at that time was primarily concerned with safeguarding the autonomy of the armed forces from political power and was therefore very careful to prevent the Committee and the Supreme Defense Commission itself from taking power away from the military ministries and, in particular, from transferring the assignment of contracts to the Committee, thus reproducing a situation similar to that created in 1917-18 by the establishment of the Ministry of Arms and Munitions. The various measures relating to civil and industrial mobilization and wartime discipline adopted between 1925 and 1934 were not in turn sufficient to lay the foundations for effective government intervention in production. Nor, as far as can be deduced from the available documentation, Mussolini, perhaps because he was preoccupied with other problems or thought he could resolve the issue when the need actually arose, showed no concern for it. The situation did not improve much even with the establishment, in the summer of 1935, of the General Commissariat for War Production. The Cogefag, being directly subordinate to the head of government, enjoyed a certain degree of

autonomy from the Committee for Civil Mobilization (which, with reduced powers, was nevertheless kept alive). Among its responsibilities was the coordination, based on current availability, of requests made in various military programs, so that, in theory, it had the possibility of establishing a scale of priorities and could benefit, through the Interministerial Commission for Raw Materials and Substitutes and Substitutes (which drew up an annual report on the relative availability and deficiencies) and other forms of collaboration, the scientific and technical support of the National Research Council, whose presidency, in 1937, was, not surprisingly, assigned to Badoglio. Despite this, in the five years of its existence (in May 1940 it was transformed into the Undersecretariat for War Production), although it was headed, as was the Committee for Civil Mobilization, by a man of great experience such as General Dallolio, Cogefag managed to coordinate very little and even less to develop production, and its role was largely reduced to the management and distribution of raw materials and technical control over 'auxiliary' plants and disciplinary control over their workers. Very little was done, although it had been under consideration since 1936, for security reasons, to decentralize the industrial plants located mainly in the North to the Center-South: in May 1941, 76 percent of the "auxiliary" plants were still concentrated in the North and especially (61.7 percent) in Piedmont, Liguria, and Lombardy. The concern to reduce production during the period necessary to carry out the transfers and the resistance of the industrial world, hostile to taking on theburden, were the main reasons for this, so that what was done in this field concerned almost exclusively the new plants. Nor were better results achieved where concentrations and choices should have been made to the detriment of companies that were too small and unable to renew their technology and production (especially numerous in the aeronautical sector). In order not to damage them and not to reduce production and employment, it was preferred to leave things as they were and resort to the system of "rain" orders and non-repayable grants. These same concerns, together with the impossibility, at least until December 1939-January 1940, of having precise rearmament programs for all weapons, the attitude of private entrepreneurs who generally "considered organizational autonomy to be closely linked to the autonomy of the company itself', the difficulty of systematic supplies of raw materials and the drastic currency restrictions imposed by the Ministry of Trade and Currency on purchases abroad1, in turn made any form of effective war production planning practically impossible. Nor should we forget one last aspect, highlighted by Minniti2 on the basis of statements made by General Antonio Sorice (from 1936 to 1941 chief of staff at the Ministry of Warin a letter from early 1942. In the two years from 1936 to 1938, Sorice wrote, an essential issue arose in parallel: Pariani argued with General Dallolio, commissioner for war manufacturing, that Italian industry should adapt to the needs of the military administration; Dallolio, on the other hand, argued that the military administration should limit its programs to the productivity of the industries. This difference in opinion gave rise to a new concept in 1938: Gen. Pariani, naturally with the consent of the Finance Ministry, which in fact took care of the difficult technical aspects of the budget, granted the industries a contribution from the state, provided that they expanded. The contribution was non-repayable and was given at the same time as orders that the industry undertook to carry out in 1941, 1942, and subsequent years. More positive results were achieved with regard to stocks, a problem that

General Dallolio had never stopped fighting since before the establishment of Cogefag, arguing for the need to create two types, rotating and intangible (and non-substitutable), and obtaining Mussolini's full support in this regard.(and not substitutable), and obtaining Mussolini's full support in this regard. In particular, however, they are estimated to be around 7 billion, due to the marked upward trend in international prices, banking transactions, and other related expenses) in foreign currency. Hence the decision adopted that, "in the unfortunate event that, as a result of a possible contraction in export traffic, the currency needed for purchases abroad were to become scarce," imports would be regulated according to the following order of priority: industrial needs: mineral oils; coal; cellulose for rayon; special minerals for ferroalloys; copper; tin, nickel, manganese; phosphates, rubber; machinery and equipment; rolled and shaped iron products; various goods for government contracts; 1 food requirements: oilseeds; corn. (See ACS, Ministry of Aeronautics, Cabinet, 1939, b. 14, phase. 2-ni-i5, "Food and industrial requirements. Minutes of the meeting held at Palazzo Venezia"). On July 1, 1937, Mussolini wrote to General Dallolio that, due to "higher necessities," it was essential to limit requests for imports from abroad with payment in currency "to a maximum of 1 million lire per month." (hence, from September to December 1937, a 30 percent reduction in steel production due to lower purchases of scrap metal abroad). The measure was reiterated on August 25, 1939, by Minister Guarneri, who reduced the availability for imports of scrap iron, copper, nickel, and tin by one third (250 million lire). For the whole issue of imports, see F. Minniti, Le materie prime nella preparazione bellica dell'Italia, op. cit. See F. Minniti, Il problema degli armamenti, op. cit., pp. 7 ff., as well as the clarifications on p. 14. On September 27, 1939, General Dallolio wrote to Mussolini on this subject: "Stocks can be of great help. For 16 years, the CMC and COGEFAG have been repeating this with firm conviction. They repeat it because everyone can form their own opinion based on ideas, but not on facts" (ACS, Pres. Cons. Ministri, Gabinetto, Atti (1934-36), b. 805, phase. 1-10/n. 4595). Already at the 1937 session of the Supreme Defense Commission, Mussolini spoke out strongly in favor of General Dallolio's request, stating that intangible reserves should "be considered on a par with the gold reserves of the Bank of Italy" (aussme, Supreme Defense Commission, b. 42, Minutes of the XIV session (February 1-11, 1937), ff. 31 ff.). On this issue, the "Duce" The problem of civilian and military stocks was carefully examined by the Supreme Defense Commission in its two sessions in 1939 and 1940. During these sessions, all three branches of the armed forces argued that existing raw material stocks were inadequate and called for their prompt replenishment in order to bring them into line with industrial capacity and war requirements and enable them to meet consumption and make up for the losses of at least six months of war. In reality, when put to the test, the stocks prepared would have been, at least during the first two years of the war, largely adequate to meet the needs. The military's estimates were in fact almost always excessive, as were their requests, both because of a lack of precise ideas about how the war would unfold (which, moreover, was initially common to all armies) and because of the widespread tendency among military leaders to take the experience of 1914-18 as a reference point. all armies)J, and because of the widespread tendency among military leaders to take the experience of 1914-18 as a reference point (a typical example being the need for ammunition, which the armed forces,

at the time of entering the war, considered to be covered by production only at 10%, while in reality it proved to be adequate and even higher than actual consumption) and both due to excessive caution and, at least until the fall of France, to try to restrain Mussolini, and, finally, due to competition between the various branches of the armed forces.5 As a result, the military itself would end up stating on several occasions in various forums. During the 1939 session, discussing liquid fuels, defined as Italy's "most vulnerable heel," and the need to maximize their autarkic production, he said: "if the engines do not run due to lack of fuel, the nation is defeated even if it is made up of lions or heroes" (cf. ibid., b. 50, Minutes of the XVI session (February 6-11, 1939), ff. 42 ff.). It should also be noted, however, that practically nothing was done to thoroughly develop the search for oil fields in Libya. The first evidence of the existence of such fields dated back to 1914; in 1928 and 1933-35, there had been various confirmations, and the first crude oil samples had been extracted in 1936 byEngineer Ardito Desio. However, a program of further research (the practical results of which are difficult to predict, given the depth of the deposits and the technical difficulties of reaching them at that time) remained a dead letter. Aussme, Supreme Defense Commission, bb. 51 and 60, Minutes of the XVI (February 6-11, 1939) and XVII (February 8-14, 1940) sessions. The first to highlight the issue was F. Bandini, Tecnica della sconfitta. Storia dei quaranta giorni che precedettero e seguirono Ventrata dell'Italia in guerra, Milan 1963, passim and especially pp. 347 ff., 412 ff., 417 ff. and 579. Typical in this sense is the prediction by some "scholars" of aeronautical problems, according to which in the first month of the war the losses of the opposing air forces would have been equal to 40-50 percent of the aircraft deployed. See the report on "Fabriguerra's activities from August 1939 to June 1941," drawn up in the second half of 1941, preserved in the Imperial War Museum Archive in London ("Fabriguerra", II, FD 1940/443) and partially published in F. Minniti, Due anni di attività del "Fabriguerra" per la produzione bellica (1939-1941), pp. 856 ff. (reference to ammunition requirements on p. 861). During the February 1940 session of the Supreme Defense Commission, the new Minister of Trade and Currency, Riccardi (according to G. Ciano, Diario cit., pp. 395 ff., with the aim of averting the possibility of entering the war, but the interpretation is unconvincing), accusing the military of soaring "in outer space" and urging them to come back "down to earth." In their demands, he said, there was "a lot of fat to be trimmed" and they were consuming more than they needed, making it impossible to build up the necessary stocks. Badoglio replied curtly that "if this and other programs cannot be met, it is not the responsibility of the Armed Forces, which prepare estimates of requirements based on the number of men to be mobilized," and he indicated that number as three million men. Mussolini replied bluntly that "the closure of the maritime borders that occurred when Italy entered the war was in reality much less detrimental to industry than even the most reckless observer could have supposed in 1939." This assessment, at least as far as oil was concerned, was also shared by the British, if on April 8, 1940, at a meeting at the Foreign Office dedicated to the situation in southeastern Europe, Sir F. Leith-Ross, expressing the point of view of the Ministry of Economic Warfare, was able to state that Italy "had accumulated excessively large reserves." The real sore points were rather others, in particular the improvisation that often characterized projects and the tendency of the military to modify them. He also stated that

he had never said he wanted more than a million men under arms, "also because modern warfare is technical warfare, and therefore requires more resources than men: it is useless to mobilize large masses that we would not know how to employ." Oraziani also argued with Riccardi, refuting the reference to "rash plans" by the Army, so that in the end Riccardi had to partially back down, saying that he had perhaps allowed himself to get carried away by "excessive polemical fervor," but insisting on two points: that faith was not enough "to have value" and that "the secret of victory lies in the exact proportion between plans and the means to carry them out." As for Mussolini, he concluded the discussion by essentially agreeing with the military. Here is how his intervention is reported in the minutes of the Supreme Defense Commission: "He believes that there is a misunderstanding at the root of this discussion. He says he dramatizes the situation much less than Minister Riccardi, who is the guardian of the uniforms. Since 1935 to today, we have always been in limbo. Guarneri has made this speech to him at least 20 times since the sanctions: 'We are not going any further'; 'We will end up succumbing .' 1935, '36, '37, etc. have passed, and we are now in 1940. I believe that at the end of the year Riccardi will say that the ship has continued to float. However, I can affirm one fact from my direct and immediate knowledge, namely that the Army's plans are adequate for the means available. There are no far-fetched programs, but programs that are adequate to our internal possibilities. Moreover, I would like to remind Riccardi that in these circumstances, the Armed Forces are the most reliable producers of currency, because nations now only demand materials that are needed for the war. I would add that, while one cannot count on the currency procured by private exporters, it is certain that when aircraft are sold abroad, this money will arrive. Therefore, if the Armed Forces request certain quantities of raw materials, we must try to satisfy them, not least because these requests are limited to the minimum necessary, below which we absolutely cannot go. If necessary, he is prepared to to literally empty the Bank of Italy's treasury, not only because it does not have a fetish for gold, but because in certain circumstances, you have to make do with whatever you have. After all, these reserves are like the iron on the island of Elba, which is always exhausted and yet always there. Now, it is clear that these difficulties exist. We are literally eating our hearts out to keep things going. All countries have these difficulties. However, there is one point to clarify, which is of fundamental importance: he despises those Italians who, , faced with present and future difficulties, stand by and say they want to see how things will turn out. It would be very remarkable to remain absent from a drama that will redraw the map of the continent. No one can perform miracles, no one asks for them, and no one has ever performed them. This is Renan's idea. It is associated with what Marshal Graziani said for the Italian General Staff. HeHe states that the Italian General Staff is up to the task; of the highest order; that it has nothing to envy the French General Staff or that of any other country. (aussme, Supreme Defense Commission, b. 57, Minutes of the 17th session (February 8-14, 1940), ff. 75 ff. and 128 ff.). See "Attività del Fabriguerra dall'agosto 1939 al giugno 1941" cit., unpublished part, chap. ix; Materie prime, ff. 3 ff. and passim. asmae, General Secretariat, p. 31, minutes transmitted by the secret services. Carli di continuo, the underutilization of facilities and, above all, the technological backwardness of large sectors of industry, which could only be partially offset by resorting to the use of foreign licenses. Other sore points were the

frequent lack of interest and resistance to the new military establishment, which led it to underestimate the importance of scientific research or to prefer traditional expenditures considered to be of safer and more urgent return. A typical example of this is the story of radar. After Marconi's initial insights in 1932 and subsequent experiments in 1934-35, and above all thanks to the work of engineer Ugo Tiberio, on the eve of World War II, Italy was potentially no less advanced in this field than Germany, England, and the United States. It must be said that, at first, the possibility of creating what would later become radar was given due consideration, so much so that in 1935 an interministerial commission for radio detector telemetry was set up and a laboratory was equipped at the Royal Electrotechnical and Communications Institute in Livorno where Tiberio could continue his studies. After this promising start, however, the Navy's interest in the project waned and, instead of concentrating their efforts and resources, the various branches of the armed forces began to act on their own. Nevertheless, despite having very limited resources, between the end of 1939 and the beginning of 1940, Tiberio built two prototypes (a third, even more sophisticated one was ready the following year) that were in no way inferior to the radars built by the British, but the lack of interest and short-sightedness of the higher military authorities meant that they were only taken seriously after it became clear at Cape Matapan (March 28, 1941) that the British had radar. Therefore, one cannot help but agree with what Tiberio himself wrote later: Overall, it can be said that the problem of radar was promptly raised and correctly framed in Italy, but that the original and rigorous scientific and technical studies were not matched by the results that would have been achieved in the military sphere if the government of the time had given advanced technical issues the consideration and resources they deserved. The seriousness of the consequences of this error can be clearly assessed even if we limit ourselves to considering the episodeof Cape Matapan, where a few modestly efficient devices would have been enough to avoid losses whose value far exceeded the financial sacrifice that would have allowed the Navy to be adequately prepared. This is without considering the ethical-military aspect of the affair, since the losses suffered without practically fighting have, from this point of view, a very serious weight. We believe that less importance should be attached to the attitude of the industrial world and, all things considered, also to the weakness of political power towards it, which has been much emphasized in recent decades in the press and also by various historians. That even important sectors of the industrial world (and we would not make too many distinctions between those who tended to move in a direction that went beyond the national market and those who were still essentially anchored to it) viewed Mussolini's policy with suspicion, concern, and sometimes dissent in 1938 and the first half of 1939 is a fact; just as it is a fact that during the drôle de guerre, almost the entire economic world was clearly in favor of a policy of neutrality, which, above all, allowed Italy to do lucrative business with both belligerents. The fall of France and with it the spread of the double conviction that the war would now last very little and thatItaly, by participating in it, would gain considerable benefits with little effort, while if it did not intervene alongside Germany, it would find itself exposed to its wrath, also led most industrialists and representatives of the economic world in general to change their attitude. Cases such as that of Alberto Pirelli (who, not surprisingly, was also a politician), who would have preferred Italy to remain

neutral, negotiate its neutrality, lead the 'neutral Balkan-Danube group', enrich itself at the expense of the belligerents, and emerge "at the end of the war economically and militarily strong enough to be a decisive factor in general peace, to its own advantage," were rare and, in any case, should not be overestimated: rather than true foresight, they in fact denote a vision of international reality and of the conflict still linked to largely traditional patterns, which, however, it must be said just as clearly, were still very widespread at that time in other belligerent countries as well. For the most part, the Italian economic and industrial world was essentially incapable, partlypartly due to its culture and mentality, and partly due to how it had experienced its relationship with the regime up to that point, to independently assess the international situation and the possible consequences of Mussolini's policies for itself and for the country. Even for those for whom entering the war was a disappointment in terms of their hopes, there is no reason to speak of a shift to even latent opposition. In the vast majority of cases, their cultural background, which was still fundamentally based on nationalistic and patriotic motivations, made this unthinkable. Thus, as "good patriots," their attitude was "now that war has been declared, all we can do is our duty and work together for victory'. That this collaboration did not prevent most of them from wanting to continue to protect their entrepreneurial autonomy as much as possible and to exploit all opportunities to further their own interests is another matter; undoubtedly important (especially when viewed in relation to the weakness or incapacity demonstrated by the political powers in the face of such behavior), but once again it cannot be viewed simplistically in terms of the industrial world's alleged responsibility for the shortcomings in war preparations, but must be addressed and understood in the light of the entrepreneurial culture that prevailed at the time in Italy and beyond. A culture based essentially on the 'rightful selfishness' of profit, of avoiding the unknowns and risks of innovation, especially when the situation was advantageous, of trying to avoid investments (unless they were guaranteed by the state or by adequate compensation) that were not immediately profitable, or that were thought to cease to be profitable as soon as the war ended. What has been said so far essentially concerns the 'efficiency' of the armed forces and only marginally the more general question of the preparation of the national economy to cope with the demands of a prolonged inter-European conflict, which is, in reality, the most historically important issue for those who truly wish to understand Italy's participation in World War II in all its aspects, strictly military, but also in terms of political strategy in the broad sense and domestic politics. By 1937-38, thanks mainly to the iMi, the iRi, and the new banking legislation, the regime had succeeded in providing Italy with a complex of financing institutions capable of supporting the development of the industrial system, while at the same time Mussolini had by then fully matured the conviction that an inter-European conflict was not only inevitable but was approaching. Although he did not believe that it would happen very quickly, as it actually did, and although he had not yet made his choice of sides and therefore thought he still had some time to exercise his political initiative without having to tie his hands with Berlin or London and Paris, therefore, that he could still wait to address a series of economic burdens related to war preparations in the strict sense, i.e., the "streamlining" of the armed forces. However, it is impossible to imagine that Mussolini, however ignorant he may have been of military and

economic matters, did not in some way consider the problem of effectively preparing the country as a whole, and first and foremost its economy, for the coming conflict. This was all the more so because he was aware that this would be decisive for the future of Italy and its power. While it is now practically accepted in historiography that, in Mussolini's assessments and operational plans, the conflict that began in 1939 was not expected to take place before 1942-43, if not in the second half of the 1940s, very few people have begun to address the question of Italy's preparation for this deadline in positive terms, so to speak. Among these, Minniti has gone the furthest. Breaking away from the increasingly unsatisfactory usual patterns, inhis latest study published to date, he began to outline the essential features of the overall development model that would govern Italy's preparations, summarizing it in these terms: This original and ambitious model can be described as a three-lane road, all running in the same direction. On one lane, the regime set about reorganizing the armed forces and began their rearmament; onthe other, the expansion of the industrial apparatus that this rearmament was to achieve at the same time was initiated; on yet another, the development of a complex of 'civilian' activities involving both agricultural and industrial production (autarchy) and infrastructure (rail, maritime, and road communications, followed by land reclamation, hydraulic works, and construction) was to proceed without falling behind. The achievement of the capacity to deal militarily with a European conflict and, therefore, in the first place, the full efficiency of the armed forces, was not to hinder or be disconnected from Italy's economic development, since both objectives were intended to promote and strengthen the autonomy of its position among the European powers and, at the same time, the stability of the regime. The launch of this development plan coincided with the war in Ethiopia. Among its logical consequences was the fact that, even when it was still possible, the option of widespread importation of finished products, including weapons, and the political choice 'not to damage those classes whose immediate economic and political interests could have been jeopardized by a total mobilization of resources, thus threatening the internal balance of the regime'. According to Minniti[2], the model's greatest weakness lay not so much in the limited availability of resources as in the time factor, i.e., the prolonged period of peace that was needed for the three channels to be pursued at the speed set by military and civilian programs, given that availability. This condition ceased to exist too soon, but neither the tragic decision of spring 1940 nor the different and unexpected course of the war at the end of that year, led to the abandonment of the model in favor of a system that involved the rapid and drastic shift of resources towards war production, which represented a necessary transition from the economy of a war 'in preparation', as was the case from 1935 to 1940, and the economy of a war 'being fought', which was proposed from 1941 onwards. The abandonment of the model was instead imposed, initially to an insufficient extent and with an unbridgeable delay, from the end of 1942 onwards by the process of rationalization of industrial production inspired by the German experience, a process that appears to have been induced more by the progressive depletion of resources than by an autonomous choice on the part of Italian political, military, and economic leaders, and "suggested" by the growing weight of opinions, "advice' and interests of the ally. With this approach to the question of war preparation, Minniti has undoubtedly taken the study and understanding of the issue to a

higher level, even if two of the points he touches on seem to us to need more detailed focus: the date on which the preparation itself actually began and the political will of the regime not to damage and therefore alienate the economic classes that a total mobilization of resources could have put in difficulty. With regard to the first point, we believe that the war in Ethiopia constitutes a backdating, while it would be more correct to place its beginning after the conquest of the Empire and, more precisely, in 1937-38. As for the second point, if, as it seems, Minniti is referring to the entrepreneurial classes and if he wants to use this to explain the weakness and inability of the political power to counter certain behaviors and to impose greater tax burdens on them, the issue must, in our opinion, be addressed in broader terms and taking into account situations that occurred at different times. This is both to avoid lending credence to the idea of a business world with its own positions and scope for action, which, as far as major political decisions are concerned, essentially only existed at the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943; and also so as not to transform the weakness or inability demonstrated by the political powers to counter the most 'selfish' behaviors into a conscious political choice, when these were largely the consequences of the sluggishness and traditional 'inferiority complex' of the civil and military bureaucratic machine with respect to the economic world and the possibilities for maneuver that this opened up, at all levels, to the business world, and which politicians were generally reluctant to crush, as well as more or less conscious collusion so as not to provoke 'scandals' that would upset the business world. at all levels, to the business world and which politicians were generally reluctant to crack down on, as well as due to more or less conscious collusion so as not to cause 'scandals' that would upset the image of 'granitic compactness' that the regime wanted to promote and could depress the 'public spirit'. At this point, if we accept Minniti's approach to the question of war preparations, the problem is to understand why Mussolini, who entered the war in June 1940, did not set aside the model of 'war in preparation' and, above all, did not abandon it even in 1941-42, when the prospect of a short conflict lost credibility and faded completely. In 1938 and early 1939, Mussolini, as mentioned above, did not believe in a short conflict. Proof of this can be found in the fact that during this period, the war industry was kept, by Mussolini's order, at production levels below its capacity, and that the aeronautical industry in particular, in order to obtain currency with which to purchase raw materials without placing further strain on the reserves of the Bank of Italy, exported massively abroad, to the point that in March 1938 Göring pointed out with concern to the aviation attaché in Berlin, Lieutenant Colonel Giuseppe Teucci, that Italy had exported more aircraft than Germany the previous year. The various international crises that followed in 1938 and the first half of 1939, while producing, as already mentioned, a series of accelerations and decelerations in the 'efficiency" of the armed forces, they did not, however, bring about any real changes in the basic lines and timing of the preparation of the national economy. Moreover, neither the outbreak of the conflict in the summer of 1939 nor the first German victories in the West had any real influence on these. Before deciding to intervene, Mussolini waited until May 27-28, so that he could be sure of the success of the German operations against France. To the elements cited so far in this regard, we can now add another that confirms his uncertainties and the importance he attached to the possibility of not depending essentially

on the German "ally" for supplies'. Almost certainly as a result of the publication of the first 'Pietromarchi report' on the British naval blockade and in a last-ditch attempt to restrain Mussolini, on May 23, a British delegation led by the Master of the Rolls arrived in Rome from London and announced to Pietromarchi himself, head of the Economic Warfare Office at Palazzo Chigi, the decision 'not to divert or stop Italian ships [Italian] ships other than to identify them." Pietromarchi replied that the measure would have little practical value unless the granting of "navycerts" was also regulated, limiting them only to weapons and certain key goods of real importance. The British accepted the request. Mussolini, having learned of the terms of the agreement reached, expressed his perplexity on the evening of the 24th. The following morning, he first gave instructions to "drag out the negotiations," then ordered them to be broken off to prevent a request for explanations from Berlin, which had been alerted by a communiqué from the Havas agency. The episode is significant, but even more so is the fact that, on closer inspection, a significant part of the decisions taken in the months following the start of World War II were not related either to the prospect of Italian intervention, albeit not in the very short term, or to that of a short war, which Mussolini had been discussing at length with his collaborators and with the Germans, citing the impossibility for the Italian economy to sustain a prolonged conflict. A characteristic example of this is the decision to double the artillery program adopted between March and April 1940. Since it would take at least five years to implement, "any connection with the use of such artillery in the conflict that was now imminent" can be ruled out, so another explanation must be sought. And, among the possible explanations, one of the most plausible is, as Minniti wrote, that the decision was part of a program "not so much in view of immediate needs as of an even more dangerous post-war period dominated by a victorious Germany." This explanation fits in well with a series of others, among which the most notable is the decision to continue the fortification of the border with Germany even after June 1. At this point, it is clear that if we want to understand the real prospects and plans with which Mussolini entered the war on June 1, 1940, we must question and, in many cases, drastically revise more than one of the conclusions that have been taken for granted until now. We must do so by starting, on the one hand, from the value and fundamental significance that Mussolini attributed to the war in a context that went beyond the conflict with France and England and projected itself onto the aftermath of the conflict itself, onto the relations that would be established between Italy and Germany and, on the other hand (although in many respects one could even say as a consequence) from the type of war he expected to have to fight, which is, after all, the only way to assess, not abstractly, the degree of preparation with which it was faced. In the last two chapters of the previous volume, we indicated what, in our opinion, were the actual basic lines of Mussolini's policy between July 1939 and June 11940. To summarize as much as possible, they can be summarized around a few key points. Mussolini, however concerned he was about Hitler's dynamism and duplicity (which, paradoxical as it may seem, were the two "arguments" that most prompted him to want the "Pact of Steel," deluding himself that it would be a tool to keep Germany in check), never seriously considered changing sides. This was firstly because of his conviction that the future belonged to young and demographically expanding peoples and that Italy's future could and should be realized in the Mediterranean and from the

Mediterranean towards 'the ocean', and therefore at the expense of France and above all England, and secondly because of his fear of being left alone, exposed to German overpower and revenge. Seeing the maintenance of peace fade away for at least another three or four years (during which he hoped to increase the "efficiency" of the armed forces and the overall preparation of the economy), he first attempted to avert the outbreak of war and then his own intervention, hoping in the meantime to lay the foundations for a negotiated and compromise peace, of which he could be the arbiter and which would allow him to gain substantial territorial and political advantages. He was only persuaded to intervene when he was certain that France was now irretrievably out of the game (the affair of the "Porte Burgunde' affair in April is eloquent in this regard. X believed, as he told the top military leaders on May 29, that the current situation 'does not allow for further delay, because otherwise we run greater risks than those On April 1, 1940, the German High Command, in view of the launch of the offensive against France, asked its Italian counterpart to study the various possibilities for Italian participation in the operations being prepared, showing a strong interest in this taking the form of sending an expeditionary force of 20-30 divisions to southern Germany. These troops were to enter into action on the German left wing (Upper Rhine), advancing through the Vosges towards the Langres plateau and, prospectively, along the Rhone, towards the south. Graziani immediately studied the proposal, making it the subject of a memorandum to Mussolini in which he cautiously expressed his support for further discussion of the proposal with the Germans (which was based on plans drawn up at the time of the Triple Alliance and which, it later emerged, was personally supported by Hitler). Badoglio, on the other hand, was strongly opposed and expressed this view to Mussolini on April 15. The proposal was dropped, but everything suggests that this was not so much because of Badoglio's opposition, but because Mussolini, at that moment, had no intention of breaking the deadlock and going to war. It is significant that when, around June 20, the Germans were marching south and Mussolini was forced (as will be discussed later) to give the order to attack in the Alps so as not to run the risk of them marching on Marseille while the Italians remained stationary and 'outflanked' in the west by their ally, his concern was to tell Graziani that he had never known about the German proposal of two months earlier ('I repeat, I never knew anything about Porta Burgunda; do you understand?"). This statement can only be explained by the fear that Hitler would learn that the decision to drop his proposal had not been taken unilaterally by Badoglio, but by him, so as not to go to war before seeing how the German offensive was progressing (see Sme Uff. Storico, L'Esercito italiano alla vigilia della 2a guerra mondiale cit., pp. 153 ff. and 471 ff.; R. Oraziani, Ho difeso la patria cit., pp. 202 ff.; E. Canevari, Graziani mi ha detto, Rome 1947, pp. 33 ff.; E. von Rintelen, Mussolini l'Alleato. Memories of the German Military Attaché in Rome (1936-1943), Rome 1952, pp. 77 ff.; S.M.E. Historical Office, Le operazioni del giugno 1940 sulle Alpi occidentali, Rome 1981, pp. 43 ff.). that could have been provoked by premature intervention" and believed that the elimination of France would quickly lead to the defeat of England as well, or induce it to negotiate a settlement of the conflict. And even then, most likely, he hoped until the very end that Italian intervention (combined with American non-intervention) could provoke or at least hasten the opening of negotiations. So much so that in the instructions he gave on May 29 to

Badoglio, Oraziani, Pricolo, and Cavagnari, and again on June 4 to Badoglio, he spoke out more and more drastically in favor of a 'defensive squeeze on land and in the air in all sectors' (and also at sea as far as French ships were concerned, not in mixed Anglo-French formations) with the sole exception of air actions against Malta, Alexandria, and Gibraltar. This behavior can only be explained if it is placed in a very particular logical context. On the one hand, he looked to Paris and London and hoped to be able to assume a mediating role in the short or very short term, and therefore did not want to go beyond an almost platonic taking up of arms so as not to jeopardize the possibility of exercising that role. On the other handthe other, looked to Berlin and was already thinking about the difficulties that would follow and, therefore, did not want to commit himself fully militarily ('The Duce, Badoglio reported to the chiefs of staff of the three arms, has said that it is his intention, , with the declaration of war, to change the status quo into a state of law, but that he intends to reserve the armed forces, and especially the army and air force, for future events") and in any way further exacerbate relations with France. So much so that Badoglio, in the aforementioned meeting of June 5, could rightly observe: "This makes me think that he does not want to burn all bridges with France in order to keep her on side." And when he changed his instructions on June 20, ordering Italian troops to go on the offensive in the Alps at dawn the following day, Mussolini did so with an explanation that confirms what his expectations must have been and suggests his concerns were not only about prestige but also about political and military matters. The minutes of the meeting held that afternoon at Palazzo Venezia with Badoglio, Soddu, Oraziani, and Pricolo read as follows: The Duce stated that the military situation on the western border was deteriorating and read, in confirmation, numerous documents showing that German forces had reached Lyon and were penetrating Savoy; several bridges over the Rhone had been destroyed; French plenipotentiaries were already on their way back to Bordeaux, while similar contacts with us had not yet begun; the French air force was now virtually ineffective; and in the Alpine region, troops were being gathered and moved westward. Numerous other communications from various sources confirm the above situation. The Duce concludes by stating that any further delay in order to achieve a more complete preparation for theattack would no longer respond to the situation would also entail the risk of having to watch the Germans march on Marseille without our forces having occupied the territory that belongs to us. He therefore considers it necessary to begin the offensive at dawn tomorrow, Friday, June 21, 1940. xviii. A very important, if not decisive, contribution to the focus of this overall political picture is offered by the unpublished "Diary Notes" that Dino Grandi wrote in Portugal in 1943-45 (and, therefore, at a time when he could think of anything but defending Mussolini and mitigating his responsibilities) commenting on events and taking inspiration from what Mussolini (in Storia di un anno), the fascists, the anti-fascists, and much of the international press were saying about him. In these "notes," the themes of the "Pact of Steel," "non-belligerence," and intervention are recurrent. In them, Grandi states with extreme firmness that Mussolini did not intend to enter the war alongsidehis ally Germany. He did not think about preparing the army. He believed in a short war and not in a German victory, but in a compromise peace, any peace, in which he would play the role of Munich. Among the various testimonies cited, one of the richest refers to October 1939: Mussolini himself,

announcing my appointment as President of the Chamber, had told me: 'Before September 1, your appointment as President of the Chamber would not have been possible, because you are not a man of the Axis. In fact, I had decided to appoint Farinacci, who was the candidate favored by the Germans. I had already announced this to Farinacci last July, when the position became vacant. But I preferred to wait, and I did well. The Germans have 'betrayed' us. And I intend to use your appointment to demonstrate, as I did with the appointment of the recent government, that we intend to conduct politics on our own behalf, in complete freedom." And Mussolini repeated, his face dark, "Because the Germans have betrayed us, presenting us with a fait accompli of war and an agreement with Russia." "Wasn't that what you wanted, after all?" Then he added: "After all, the Germans will soon realize the serious mistake they have made. And they will realize it on the day when their efforts are crushed against the Maginot Line, which is impregnable. You wanted the formal denunciation of the alliance on September 1. But that would have been a mistake. We must not forget the danger we are in and the fact that there is a large faction within the French General Staff that insists on a preventive war against Italy. But we must also not forget the fact that there is a current in Germany which, realizing the impossibility of breaking through the Maginot Line and the Rhine, thinks of the Po Valley as the classic theater of war between Germany and France. A new Battle of Pavia. And that is what I always think about. We must prevent both the French and the Germans from moving in this direction. The formal denunciation of the Italian-German alliance would have weakened us too much in Paris and given 'dangerous' ideas in Berlin, where too many people despise us as the traitors of 1915 and 1939." Hence what, in a sense, can be considered his conclusion: The fact that Mussolini did not enter the war on August 31, 1939, demonstrates that he did not conceive of the alliance as an instrument of war. Despite his literature, the Fascist-Nazi ideology, and the political program for Europe, Mussolini did not want to enter the war on August 31 and only did so in June 1940, not driven by his duty of solidarity with Germany but rather by a calculation that would later prove to be wrong. Dunkirk was not England's defeat. Dunkirk was Italy's defeat. It seems paradoxical, but it is true. Without the British defeat at Dunkirk, Mussolini would not have entered the war, despite his alliance with Germany. He himself had managed to rein in his demon. He entered the war driven by fear of Germany. At first, before the collapse of France, when he still felt able to resist German pressure to intervene in the conflict, Mussolini perhaps toyed with the idea of a long war that would exhaust both sides, allowing him to strengthen himself and thus increase his diplomatic and military 'decisive weight'. The collapse of France and the decision to intervene in the conflict certainly led him to focus his entire political and military strategy on the prospect of a short war that was as independent as possible from that of Germany. It is hardly surprising that Mussolini wanted a short war. Even aside from the obvious consideration that anyone facing a war would hope for it to be as short as possible, countless reasons led him to stake everything on this hope: psychological and ideological motivations, practical necessities, political considerations of primary importance to him, as well as a series of suggestions of various origins and natures, not least that of the much-theorized, by Pariani, but not only by him, 'war of short duration'. From both a psychological and ideological point of view, the experience of 1914-18 led him instinctively

to associate the idea of a long war with the massacres that had bled all the main belligerents dry and to translate it, once again, in the footsteps of Le Bon, in the belief that, by causing the death of the youngest and most vigorous and entrusting repopulation to the weakest and oldest, it would produce a negative selection, a demographic and spiritual regression of the race. From a more strictly military and economic point of view, he was aware both of the nature and limitations of the 'efficiency' of the armed forces and of the inadequacy of Italy's basic economic preparation, which made a short war possible but not a long one. 'Wars are not waged when one is ready: they are waged when one must wage them. If we listened to you, we would never be ready... The war will be over by October." These angry words addressed to Soddu in mid-May 1940 sum up Mussolini's point of view well, while at the same time revealing both the psychological weight of the "state of necessity" that was leading him to intervene and his conviction that the war would not last longer than six months, which, according to military estimates, which he considered, as usual, excessively pessimistic, Italy would have to face. Some scholars have argued more or less explicitly that Mussolini would have aimed for a short war also for reasons of domestic policy, so as not to subject the masses to sacrifices and disciplines that were too heavy and prolonged and, therefore, unpopular and politically dangerous. In support of this thesis, they cited the mobilization system adopted for the military, the renunciation of the militarization of the workforce, and even the "civil mobilization', the reluctance to increase working hours, the late introduction of food rationing and its initial containment within rather broad limits, etc. some have also spoken of increased recourse to "anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois demagogy" with the dual purpose of accrediting an image of the "revolutionary" consequences that the war would have on the social front and of counterbalancing with words the favorable treatment that, especially on the fiscal level, was given to the wealthy classes and in particular to those most interested in production. We will dwell on some of these issues in the following chapters; for the moment, it seems sufficient to limit ourselves to a few specific observations. There is no doubt that the issue of the "home front" was deeply felt by a man like Mussolini, who during the 1914-18 war had personally followed its events and repercussions on the Italian situation and had assessed its decisive weight on the Russian and German situations. Similarly, there is no doubt that it was present throughout the regime and, among its various components, especially in the more strictly fascist one, which made its relationship with the masses one of the cornerstones of its ideology, its political practice, and its present and future power. However, concerns about the 'internal front' had practically no impact for at least four reasons: because the very brevity of the war on which Mussolini was counting made them secondary; because for most of the second half of 1940, the conviction that the war would be short and would end victoriously before winter was not only practically a dogma for the fascist ruling class, but was widespread throughout the country; because the apparatus control, prevention, and repression apparatus at the regime's disposal was such that it left no appreciable margin for the emergence of a real crisis on the "home front" (which in fact would only take shape much later, as a result of the irremediably negative course of the war, the Allied air raids, and the parallel crisis of the regime's structures); because, as Mussolini would say in the Grand Council on the night between July 24 and 25, 1943, "the truth is that no war is

'popular' when it begins, and it is easy to understand why; it becomes so if it goes well, and if it goes badly, it becomes very unpopular," and in the short term, victory seemed within reach, which meant that the unity of the "home front" was if anything, strengthened. And even broadening the discussion from the 'home front' in the strict sense to the masses of mobilized personnel, the actual terms of the problem did not change, despite the fact that, at this level, a series of technical, organizational, and equipment deficiencies (especially in the Army) were more noticeable. But we will return to this in detail in the following chapters. Finally, can we ignore the fact that the evidence adduced by those who have put forward the thesis that internal political considerations weighed heavily on the choice of a short war is in many cases questionable in part or in whole and, above all, it must be said that such evidence gains or loses value depending on the correctness of the relationship established between it and the choice of a short war. It is clear that if the facts cited were premises or consequences of that choice, their contribution to the thesis under discussion is very different. Although incomprehensible to many, the system adopted for mobilization, not for entire classes, but based on individual selection across several classes (and, in this respect, it had a negative effect on public spirit since, above all, it lent itself to abuse and favoritism), certainly did not aim to avoid (through the use of individual draft cards) the posting of posters that could have depressed public spirit, but tended to rationalize the mechanism of mobilization itself, ensure that the armed forces had the necessary specialists, and create as few difficulties as possible for production and the functioning of civilian life. As for the decision not to militarize the workforce on a large scale, this was due to its practical uselessness and the organizational difficulties of such a measure: unlike during the First World War (when militarization was implemented on a large scale), the situation in factories did not require the use of such a measure and, in any case, the regime had other instruments at its disposal that could, if necessary, achieve the same results at a much lower bureaucratic and political cost. Both of these facts can be placed in the more general context of 'civil mobilization', to which it is necessary to devote a little more space, since it is not sustainable that the regime, upon entering the war, renounced it in order to avoid the risk of unpopularity. In its February 1939 session, the Supreme Defense Commission decided to entrust the Ministry of War, in agreement with the Ministry of Corporations and the PNF, with the task of conducting an experiment in "civil mobilization" in Piedmont and Lazio with two specific objectives: to replace those "required to perform military service" needed by industry, government, and various agencies, and to "supplement the war needs of the various agencies mentioned above with personnel not required to perform military service." The experiment took place between July 1 and December 15 and involved 265,000 civilians eligible for mobilization (000 of whom were required to perform military service, of whom 57,000 had been declared replaceable). However, it had led to a considerable expansion of the tasks initially envisaged for the PNF. The military's intention was that the party should only be responsible for identifying and utilizing minors (aged 14 to 18) and women; since the military districts were unable to register those not subject to conscription (aged 18 to 70) and did not have males under conscription age or over the age of 50 in their ranks, the party took on the tasks that the military was unable to perform and, moreover, extending the preparatory work to the whole country on its own initiative, creating its own

ad hoc organizational structure, and showing its intention to enter into matters of military competence (such as agricultural licenses) through "civil mobilization," it had in fact laid the foundations for claiming a much greater role than the one assigned to it. And, albeit to a lesser extent, it had shown that it wanted to act as a ministry of corporations, promoting the contribution of provincial corporate councils, trade union bodies, and theCentral Labor Office. Given this situation, the Supreme Defense Commission, in its February 1940 session, found itself faced with two opposing tendencies: that of the Ministry of War, which, while declaring that the experiment had been positive and that the organization of "civil mobilization" should be started so that it would be ready by March 1941, considered it necessary to make 'procedural adjustments and completion of details' and, in essence, reiterated the principle that 'civilian mobilization' should be entrusted to the military districts for males aged 18 to 70 and to the PNF, in agreement with the Ministry of War itself, for minors and women; and that of the PNF, now entirely focused on maintaining its monopoly in the most totalitarian terms: 'the civil mobilization of citizens... requires an appropriate, unified, and permanent organization that frames the entire civilian population fit for work like an orderly army; there is no need to create such an organization because it already exists and is efficient: it is the PNF." Faced with such a clear position, however, the military preferred to retreat; Soddu and Badoglio had masked it by asserting that "the military districts would be suffocated by these new serious tasks," while Mussolini, for his part, had given them a hand so that they would not lose face completely: 'civil mobilization' was entrusted to the Ministry of Corporations (for men aged 19 to 70) and the PNF (for young people aged 14 to 18 and women aged 14 to 70) with the mandate to make it operational by the end of 1940. At the time of Italy's entry into the war, 'civil mobilization' was aussme, Supreme Defense Commission, b. 61, phase. "Mobilization of citizens" and Minutes of the XVII session (February 8-14, 1940), ff. 108 ff. With the law of May 24, 1940, no. 461 on the discipline of citizens in wartime, which established the compulsory nature of civil mobilization service, the maximum age limit for both men and women was lowered to 65. Given the large number of women eligible for recruitment (about 14 million), the PNF effectively lowered the age limit for them to 45 and excluded married women and widows with children from the list of those eligible for recruitment. Therefore, in preparation for and at the end of 1940, according to PNF figures, out of a nominally recruited force of about 6 million individuals, approximately 25,000 (out of 35,000 requested) had been put to work, while approximately 108,000 had attended training courses and were then used in various activities. These were undoubtedly extremely modest figures, which, however, must be evaluated in light of at least three factors. First, the practice of making assignments based on place of residence had been followed. Second, since mobilization had not been massive, requests had been reduced and it had been preferred to satisfy them mainly with the unemployed. Thirdly, by the autumn of 1940, the belief that the end of the war was imminent was so deeply rooted that the PNF had already begun to study the 'problems associated with the cessation of the state of war', including the 'demobilization of civilian activities' (which the Supreme Defense Commission was supposed to discuss in its February 1941 session, canceled only a month before it was due to begin by Mussolini as a result of the military situation in Albania and Africa and the shelving of the planned German landing

in England), so that in this climate, "civilian mobilization" had ceased to be a real problem for the party to engage in fully and had essentially become an opportunity, a pretext to further increase its political role in society, and thus to return to supporting the need to manage it all on its own. In short, the same objective that the party, now passed from the hands of Ettore Muti to the firmer and more secure hands of Adelchi Serena, set out to achieve by taking the initiative to outline the main lines of demobilization of civilian activities related to the state of war and the conversion of the national economy. The stated aim of these measures was to prevent the end of the war from causing unemployment, a reduction in the overall level of wages, allowances, and subsidies, and a shift in the price regime. In reality, the overall structure of the proposal drawn up by the PNF and the priorities it established suggest that it aimed further and corresponded, or at least broadly interpreted Mussolini's intentions and concerns for the post-war period. What is certain is that it corresponds well to the model of economic development reconstructed by Minniti with reference to Italy's preparations for war. The cornerstones of the conversion were to be the resumption of civilian industrial activities that had been reduced or interrupted for reasons of war, thelaunch of new productive activities, the large-scale resumption of land reclamation and public works (roads, ports, etc.), the implementation of programs already prepared by the Building Corporation for the large-scale construction of public housing, and mass emigration to Albania, Libya, Aoi, and the territories that would become part of theItalian colonial empire under the forthcoming peace treaties. Of the entire program, however, the point that, in our opinion, most reveals the concerns of the Fascist leadership is the fact that the PNF proposal placed the continuation of war production "for a certain period" in first place, in order to avoid the "devaluation of equipment." After what has been said about "civil mobilization,", it seems pointless to dwell on the alleged reluctance to increase working hours. It is clear that this was not due to internal political calculations, but to other considerations, in particular that of altering as little as possible the pace set out in what we will call, for brevity's sake, the 'Minniti model' (an increase in working hours would have led to a different distribution of available raw materials) and, rather, to draw on the reservoir of unemployment where necessary, as had been the case for years. As for the belated introduction of rationing, the memoirs of the then Director General of Food, Vittorio Ronchi, clearly show his reasons: firstly, the widespread belief that the war would be over very quickly ("it will last a few months... in the fall you will be able to resume your normal activities," he told him in June, the Undersecretary for Agriculture, S. Nannini, immediately after his appointment, and again in September, Tassinari said he was convinced that the war would end quickly) and, secondly, the lack of any serious preparation to deal with the problem, combined with a series of bureaucratic difficulties and overlapping responsibilities, which in turn delayed the effective functioning of the bodies responsible for dealing with it. Finally, we do not believe that the last issue remaining on the table, that of the increased use of anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois demagogy and its alleged reasons, deserves much discussion. This is essentially for two reasons. Because, as we have seen at length in the previous volume, Mussolini and Fascism had launched their anti-bourgeois campaign as early as 1938, before the war, when they did not think it would come so soon, and in a much broader perspective, that of 'moral reform' and 'totalitarian turn'. And

because the same can be said about fiscal policy: established at the end of 1936, it essentially had three objectives: to rationalize the tax system, to counteract the speculative use of movable capital, and above all to reassure savers, avoiding as far as possible that they would desert government bonds and take refuge in real estate investments (especially land). At this point, with the problem of the "internal front" out of the way, two of the essential aspects of Mussolini's political-military strategy at the time of his decision to enter the war should now be clear: namely, that whatever he might sometimes say, he was well aware of the nature and limitations of the "efficiency drive' of the armed forces and the inadequacy of the economy's basic preparation for a long war, but that he was also convinced that the conflict would end quickly with the inevitable defeat of England as well, so that the only real uncertainty for him remained how the war would end, whether as a result of the German invasion of England or, even earlier, at the negotiating table. Of the two solutions, Mussolini preferred the latter, both because it was quicker and, according to his hopes, would allow him to re-emerge as a sort of mediator, and because it would have lessened Germany's arrogance and appetites and, with them, its ascendancy over other European nations. However, clarifying these two aspects, however essential, of Mussolini's political-military strategy is not enough. It helps to understand why the 'Duce', as long as he believed in a short war and staked everything on it, did not want to substantially change the basic lines of the Italian economic development program and, in order not to hinder the rapid conclusion of the conflict, also set asidethe idea of taking action against Yugoslavia, which (in addition to corresponding to his old state of mind and serving to regain the influence over Budapest that had been largely taken from him by Germany) would have ensured Italy access to certain necessary raw materials. It also helps to explain why, contrary to all military and political logic, a military success in Egypt, even if it would most likely not have decided the war (but would have given a boost to the British circles most reluctant to risk a deadly confrontation with the Axis), would have had significant repercussions on the governments bordering the Mediterranean. He did not consider it necessary for the Italian armed forces to immediately attack the British in North Africa and the Mediterranean, and even where he would have liked to take action, i.e. at sea, he was easily persuaded not to do so by the military leaders in charge (Badoglio and Cavagnari in particular) who, as we shall see in the next chapter, partly out of calculation and partly because of the inefficiency of the military intelligence services in this field, presented him with a balance of power that was largely favorable to the British, when in fact the reality was exactly the opposite. However, this does not explain why, when the belief that the war would be short appeared increasingly unjustified (in the winter of 1940-41) and for a long time afterwards (until about the second half of 1942), when it was replaced by the belief that, quite the opposite, that the war would be long, difficult, and certainly involve, as much as and even more than in 1915-18, a commitment of all the moral and material energies of the country, the economic model that Minniti defined as "war in preparation" was not substantially abandoned, and the available resources were therefore not used to the maximum to enable the national economy to cope as well as possible with the needs of a 'war being fought'. As we shall see in a later chapter, in the winter of 1940-41, the problem of the 'home front', which had been politically irrelevant in the previous months, began to

take on importance, at times (since public sentiment was characterized until the second half of 1942 by ups and downs depending on the military fortunes of the Axis) even considerable. However, to conclude that the long delay was due to a desire not to impose excessively heavy sacrifices on the country is too simplistic. cit., p. 191, which refers to this statement made by Mussolini at the end of April 1940: "Listen, Graziani, we must bring Yugoslavia to its knees; we need raw materials, and it is in those mines that we must obtain them... Pass this problem on for study." Each of the three armed forces had its own secret service, thethe Army had the SIM, the Navy had the SIS, and the Air Force had the SIA. Of the three, the most important and with a history of great efficiency was the SIM, headed since November 1939 by General Giacomo Carboni, who was replaced on September 20, 1940, by his deputy, General Cesare Amé, who headed it until August 18, 1943. There are no studies of a scientific nature on the Italian secret services . For memoirs, see C. Amé, Guerra segreta in Italia (1940-1943), Rome 1954; for official accounts, see SMD SIFAR, Il Servizio Informazione Militare italiano dalla sua costituzione alla fine della seconda guerra mondiale, s.l. 1957, pp. 61 ff.; and finally, for journalistic accounts, G. Pillon, Spie per l'Italia (Spies for Italy), Rome 1968; C. De Risio, Generali, servizi segreti e fascismo. La guerra nella guerra 1940-1943 (Generals, Secret Services, and Fascism. The War Within the War 1940-1943), Milan 1978 (both largely inspired by General Amé). The first to emphasize (albeit somewhat simplistically at times) this latter problem was F. Bandini, Tecnica della sconfitta cit., passim. Mussolini, the armed forces, and the "parallel war" 103 It is simplistic to attribute the abandonment, towards the end of 1942, of the model of the "war in preparation' model towards the end of 1942 to the impossibility of ignoring the growing pressure from the Germans in this regard. As usual, these reasons (especially the second) and others, such as the progressive depletion of resources, undoubtedly played a part. But the decisive factor, in our opinion, was another. As incredible as it may seem, once Mussolini had entered the war, he was not so much concerned about the course it would take in the coming months or even weeks: taking German victory for granted and expecting it to be swift, what worried him, as we have already mentioned, was essentially what would happen afterwards, the relations that would be established between Germany and Italy at the end of the conflict, the place and role that Italy would have in the 'new order' in Europe and beyond that would emerge from it. There is no question that Mussolini thought he could secure substantial territorial, economic, and political advantages through his participation in the war, or rather, through Germany's victory. However, to believe, as Knox does, that he really thought he could secure them through a series of military successes is misleading, as is believing that it was Badoglio, Oraziani, Cavagnari, and others who forced him to renounce his alleged aggressive intentions with their objections and resistance. In reality, now that Italy had entered the war, these men could only irritate him with their lack of both "warrior spirit" and political sense, their concern to avoid responsibility and risk, and the power struggles that all this often concealed. Nor was it in Mussolini's interest at that moment to reach a clarification that, all things considered, it was better for him to postpone until after victory. And in fact, the only scaling back of his initial military plans that he accepted, albeit with great irritation (and, in any case, in April, when everything was still sub judice, because the collapse of France would have made everyone more malleable) was

about the role of the Navy, which, in his original intentions, was supposed to go on the offensive against the British "across the Mediterranean and beyond" but which, instead, managed to remain on the defensive by putting forward a series of reasons, most of which were of dubious consistency, and by emphasizing the certainty of "huge" losses that would have brought Italy to the peace negotiations "not only without territorial guarantees, but also without a fleet and perhaps without an air force." Once the war had been decided, Mussolini, in his realism, wanted everything except to run the risk of setbacks that would damage the already less than glowing image that the Italian armed forces had abroad and, in any case, to suffer losses in men and equipment that would further weaken their efficiency. He wanted to reach peace as unweakened as possible, especially with regard to the Army and Air Force, the two branches that would have the greatest weight in the difficult post-war context. In this regard, it is revealing what Badoglio reported on June 5 to Soddu and the three chiefs of staff, namely that the "Duce" intended to "reserve the armed forces, and especially the Army and Air Force, for future events." This decision was in line with the decision to continue fortification work on the northern border and confirms Minniti's interpretation, as already mentioned, who saw the launch, two months earlier, of the new additional program of artillery construction, not in reference to the ongoing conflict, but to the situation that would arise in the postwar period, in a postwar period, in fact, "dominated by a victorious Germany." And, we might add, on the one hand, exalted in its dynamism and, on the other, not without justified reasons for resentment and suspicion towards Italy. In keeping with his character, Mussolini was driven by a series of stimuli, resentments, fears, and moods that he had carried within him for years and which, now re-emerging with new vigor, suggested to him plans such as those to "settle scores" with Yugoslavia and Greece. And this while the resounding German military successes aroused admiration and envy in him and made him cherish the desire to emulate them. However, limiting ourselves to these observations is not enough. In order to understand his behavior and, in particular, his political-military strategy, we must never forget that all this was inextricably mixed in him with anseries of antithetical stimuli, grudges, fears, and extremely realistic moods, based on his fear of the Germans on the one hand and his awareness of Italy's inferiority to Germany in all respects on the other. Although he was deeply troubled by this and tried to hide it in every way possible, at that moment, what Mussolini's realism really cared about was not achieving more or less spectacular military successes and securing territorial gains by force of arms to be realized later at the peace table. His desire was for the war to be short, for the Germans not to take advantage of it to alter the Balkan and Mediterranean balance of power to their advantage, and for Italy to emerge from it as little weakened as possible and in a position to act as a point of reference and political aggregation for those European countries that did not want to resign themselves to more or less passively accepting German hegemony and for which Mussolini thought Italy would inevitably become the 'other pole'. Only in this way could he hope, if not to find an effective modus vivendi with an ally so much stronger and more unscrupulous than himself once the war was over, at least to weave a new web of diplomatic balances capable of a) restoring the autonomy of movement and negotiation that he had lost first with the 'Pact of Steel' and then with the entry into the war, b) bring the Italian economy (thanks also to the territorial, economic, and political

advantages that victory would have assured him) up to the level of a true "great power,", so that it would no longer be at the mercy of German power. Only in this context does his insistence on pursuing the economic model of "war in preparation" make sense, even after it became clear to everyone in the winter of 1940-41 that the conflict would be anything but short. Until he was convinced that, even if long, it would end with the victory of the Axis, Mussolini, however serious the situations he had to face and the humiliations he had to suffer, never ceased to reason and act with a view to and under the pressure of the aftermath and, moreover, of an aftermath that the policy and behavior of the Germans towards the defeated and the allies themselves were presenting day after day in terms that were increasingly obscure to him. Hence his unwillingness to give up his efforts, even if they were inevitably increasingly disordered and futile, but not without, as we shall see, some positive results in strengthening the foundations of the national economy, so as not to find himself, at the moment of the fateful aftermath, completely dependent on Germany and more or less forcibly encapsulated in the 'great European economic space' that Berlin intended to create and whose first manifestations clearly showed the spirit that animated it and the hegemonic objectives that the Nazis wanted to achieve with it. To induce him to change his perspective and to orient the economy exclusively towards the present, towards the 'war being fought', not even the dramatic experience in Greece and the failure, as we shall see, of his hopes of entering the Anglo-Iraqi conflict to raise the Arab world against England, take Egypt from behind, and secure Middle Eastern oil. A statement he made during a conversation on July 13, 1941, with Camillo Pellizzi suggests that at this time he was still confident of victory: "in the Mediterranean [after the war] we will have only minor states or vassals around us." It took Rommel's defeat in Egypt, the Anglo-American landing in French North Africa, and Stalingrad to convince him; in other words, he had to come to terms with theidea that the war could also be lost and that, therefore, all energies should be used to avert this possibility, leaving the aftermath to Jupiter. What has been said so far shows how, throughout the years of World War II and not only in its final phase, which for Mussolini corresponded to the most dramatic and humiliating page in the history of the Italian Social Republic, the central political and moral problem for the "Duce" was that of his relationship with his German "ally." A relationship which, in keeping with his character, Mussolini, as we shall see later, experienced in an alternating, contradictory, emotional, and rational manner, often marked by recurring ups and downs and by public and private positions that do not always make him easy to understand and define precisely, but which must always be kept in mind if we are to understand both the basis of his political actions (of which the military aspect remained almost always an epiphenomenon) as well as his human drama. This relationship also explains the last issue that we wish to clarify here, that relating to his conception of parallel warfare. We have already mentioned this in the previous volume, attempting to reconstruct its genesis between mid-1939 and early 1940, when it began to take shape in Mussolini's mind until it assumed the value of a real political-military strategy, so much so that he made explicit reference to it, albeit incidentally, in his top-secret memorandum of March 31. A historical assessment of the theory that Italy should have waged its "parallel war" must take two aspects into account. From a military point of view, the "parallel war" was absurd. According to Graziani's memoirs, but the

concept is recurrent in Mussolini in 1939-40, the "Duce," speaking inApril 1940 to army and corps commanders, said that the war would be fought "not for Germany, nor with Germany, but alongside Germany." The first statement was logical and acceptable, not only from a political point of view but also from a military one; the second and third, on the other hand, were completely unacceptable, and even more so considering theenormous gap in strength between the two allies and the fact that, if the victory of the Axis could be hypothesised or even believed to be certain, this was only possible thanks to German military power. That the military establishment did not realise this and did not contest it at its root is, all things considered, and even taking into account its mentality, its feelings towards the Germans and the conviction that the war, after the collapse of France, was practically won and that, therefore, Italy's contribution would be minimal, even more serious than the fact that Mussolini, incapable as he was of seeing problems, whatever they might be, other than in terms of political strategy and, moreover, completely ignorant of military matters, could think so, and constitutes one of the heaviest responsibilities on his shoulders, as well as the best demonstration of how much he was now aligned and incapable of asserting his technical arguments not only with the " Duce' but also with the sovereign. Badoglio's responsibilities were particularly severe. Even taking into account the 'flaws of origin' of his position and Mussolini's tendency to replace him in many decisions, his passivity, even when he could have intervened without personal 'risk', exceeded all imagination (for example, by not using his authority to induce the Navy and theAir Force to cooperate effectively). General Emilio Faldella wrote pages on this subject that read like a veritable condemnation, but which we find difficult to dispute, especially now that the relevant military documentation has become accessible to scholars and, thanks to it, it is possible to make a comparison between Badoglio's management and that of Cavallero. The latter's management was certainly not without its shadows, especially with regard to Yuomo, the personality of Badoglio's successor, but which, as far as the Chief of Staff was concerned, undoubtedly represented a clear break with the previous one, at least in terms of modernity and liveliness of ideas, organizational skills, and the commitment and sometimes activism in personally following thedaily developments of operations (typical in this regard is how Cavallero followed the problem of supplies destined for North Africa on a daily basis), of trying to coordinate the contribution of the three armed forces and industrial production, in short, of that 'constructive force of intelligence' which, as Angelo Gatti had already noted in 1921, Badoglio lacked. Faldella wrote of these: Marshal Badoglio was well aware of the magnitude of a world war and the inadequate preparation of the armed forces and, precisely for this reason, tried to prevent Mussolini from deciding to intervene. When he realized that it was inevitable and imminent, he placed his trust exclusively in the imminent victory of Germany, which would resolve the problem of the Italian war for the best, and did not consider the aspects that the conflict could have taken on if the war had been prolonged, in order to devise some kind of response. He reduced himself to trying to avoid the worst, to acting as a 'kerbstone'. But the kerbstone does not fulfill its function when it does not prevent the vehicle from falling into the precipice. There is no doubt that the vehicle was driven by an eccentric, egocentric driver who was ignorant of its structure and drove it without a specific destination, with a marked tendency to go off the road, ignore the rules,

and disregard advice and warnings. Unfortunately, the marshal lacked the greater energy that would have been necessary to impose his will in order to avoid damage and the strength to throw his prestige into the balance, posing the dilemma: either accept his views or accept his resignation. It was perhaps too much to ask of a man of that time to oppose Mussolini to this extent; however, it was not too much to ask of a Chief of Staff to try to break out of a state of passive acceptance of circumstances and attempt to dominate them. Beforethe intervention, the marshal fell back on the idea of waging a war exclusively on the defensive, as the situation at the time suggested and made indispensable, but he gave up on exploiting those three years of time which, at least until early May 1940, he deluded himself into thinking he had at his disposal, to formulate a less passive war plan and energetically direct the preparations for its implementation. Stuck with the concept of a 'continental war', he failed to see that the main theater of the conflict would be the Mediterranean and, therefore, neglected to take advantage of the eight months between September 1939 and May 1940 to strengthen East Africa and Libya, drawing resources from the national territory. After the intervention, he did not foresee that the initial situation could change and was taken by surprise by the collapse of France, without a plan for continuing the fight against Great Britain. He became an advocate of the offensive in North Africa, but in the summer of 1940 he failed to assess the urgency and importance of adequately strengthening the forces when the convoys were crossing the sea unscathed. Contrary to the conclusions of the reports he himself compiled in 1939, he did not have an accurate view of the requirements of fighting in the desert and, at least until early September 1940, alongside Mussolini in his opposition to Marshal Graziani. He did not prevent the Air Corps from being sent to Belgium, did not oppose the demobilization of the Army, and shared Mussolini's concept of a "parallel war," which led to the rejection of German collaboration in Africa, a fatal error, along with those committed with the Sidi el Barrani offensive and the declaration of war on Greece. From a political point of view, the 'parallel war' undoubtedly exacerbated and aggravated the whole series of contradictions and errors that, since the end of the war in Ethiopia, had characterized Mussolini's foreign policy and the involution of his own personality. Transferred to the field of military warfare, the consequences of these contradictions and errors would constitute (especially after it became clear that the Germans had given up on landing in England), as Faldella rightly wrote, "a fatal error.". Rejecting, as Mussolini did, German assistance, even though Hitler conceived it as aid to an ally and not as a real transfer of the center of gravity of the war to the Mediterranean (as Admiral Raeder would have liked and General Guderian had already proposed in vain during the French campaign, asking Hitler to postpone thethe armistice to give him time to march on Gibraltar and cross into French North Africa with a couple of armored divisions, which was possible because Spain, at that particular moment, was also willing to enter the war) for the offensive in Egypt meant, in fact, losing the opportunity to achieve theonly objective that was truly important and, perhaps, decisive for the Axis at that time: to strike England in a place that was effectively vital to it and, thus, radically change the military and political situation in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Hillgruber's assertion that a large-scale war in the Mediterranean could have seriously damaged England's imperial position, "but would not have damaged its vital nerve," namely the Atlantic line of

communication with the United States, seems to us to be overly influenced by the course of the war following the German attack on the Soviet Union: in the second half of 1940 and the first half of 1941, uncertainty about the possible developments in German-Soviet relations, the potential Japanese threat, and the strength ofAmerican isolationism (and anti-Sovietism) created a general context in which a success for the Axis in Egypt and, consequently, in the Middle East could have led to serious political repercussions in England and a situation in which it cannot be ruled out a priori that, despite Roosevelt, the United States would not have entered the war but would have found it more appropriate to seek a compromise solution to the conflict. Having made this clear, it remains the fact that one cannot ignore that Mussolini's decision to reject German assistance was not dictated so much by jealousy towards the Germans and the desire to achieve his victories alone (although this could naturally have appealed to him), but rather by the deep-rooted mistrust he had been developing since mid-1939 towards the Germans' good faith. This deep-rooted mistrust was compounded by his traditional fear of them and his far from unjustified conviction that, contrary to their vague verbal assurances and ambiguous statements, they wanted, after victory, secure the lion's share in the Balkans and gain a firm foothold in the Mediterranean and Africa, resuming and implementing on an even larger scale what had been Guglielmo's plans in this area. Hence his conviction that Italy should wage its own "parallel war". The adjective 'parallel' should not be understood so much as a revival of the concept of 'our war' that had seduced so many in 1915-18, but rather in the sense of a war to be waged with an eye not only on military operations against the enemy, but also, in the early months, we might say, above all on the ally, on its various moves, its plans, and how mutual relations would be configured once the war was over. This was a conviction that, despite mood swings and different nuances depending on the moment, especially with regard to his personal relationship with Hitler, Mussolini would never abandon, even when the harsh reality of the facts forced him to give up the 'parallel war'. As we will have ample opportunity to say, Mussolini became convinced that the war was not going well for the Axis because the Germans had centralized all military (which Mussolini did not dispute) and political leadership, and Hitler was managing it not politically, i.e., in a realistic manner open to seizing the various opportunities that seemed to be opening up, but ideologically, renouncing the pursuit of these possibilities in order to achieve impossible objectives or ones that increased the number and resistance of his adversaries. Instead, it should have been him, Mussolini, the true political strategist of the Axis, capable of dealing with situations with realism and a sense of proportion, both in waging war and in knowing how to end it at the right moment around the diplomatic negotiating table. Chapter Two The 'short war": 1940-41 In the previous chapter, we sought to clarify the significance that Mussolini's conception and strategy of the 'parallel war'. Before delving into the next chapter on the reconstruction of the role that the 'Duce' played, directly and indirectly, in the direction of military operations (both during the period of the 'parallel war' itself and in the subsequent period, when the conviction that the war would be short faded and doubt then nightmare about how the conflict would end took hold) and, therefore, to examine essentially from this particular angle, since this is not the place to retrace in detail the military events, the essential moments of Italian participation in World War II, and the main

problems connected with them, it is necessary, however, to dwell on an aspect of this participation that is generally neglected or even ignored, even by those who have dealt with it in the particular context of Mussolini's biography, while it is our belief that it is essential for an effective understanding of Mussolini's political-military strategy and of a series of events and moments during the war itself, which would otherwise be difficult or even impossible to explain from a perspective and in a logic that is not, as usual, that of the 'Duce's' spontaneity and moodiness. If we do not want to settle for such reductive, partial, and inadequate explanations, we believe that at least two questions must be answered: 1) What objectives did Mussolini seek to achieve by participating in the war? 2) How did he conceive, in relation to both these objectives and the situation he believed would arise with the victorious conclusion of the conflict, Italy's relations with the countries against which it was at war, with the peoples who were part of them in various ways or of their colonial empires (the problem was particularly important as regards the Arab world), with the neutral countries (essentially Spain, Switzerland, and Turkey, in that order) and with his own allies and, above all, with Germany? Only by first answering these questions and relating their formulation to the course of the war (i.e., to the changing balance of power both between the two warring blocs and between Germany and Italy) can we attempt to understand Mussolini's actual position and penetrate his military strategy and, above all, his political strategy, which was always at its root from June 1940 to July 1943. This involves broadening the analysis of Mussolini's policy during the war to aspects not previously taken into consideration because they were considered too simplistically irrelevant or merely unrealistic, and also a constant reference to the military events and interventions of the 'Duce' at the political (foreign policy) moment in which they took place and vice versa. All this in the light of, or at least in the perspective of, those fundamental objectives which, until roughly the Anglo-American landing in French North Africa (November 1942), Mussolini continued to consider not only achievable but indispensable for Italy. This brings with itother very important question, both in terms of a correct understanding of Mussolini's position during this period and, above all, until he believed in the victory of the Axis first and then of the Tripartite Pact, and in terms of the theoretical debate on the nature and historical significance of the fascist phenomenon and, therefore, on the similarities and differences between fascism and National Socialism. Asking the above questions is, in fact, , on closer inspection, to taking a somewhat critical stance towards those who, with various and in some cases conflicting arguments, have claimed that by participating in World War II, Mussolini aimed to obtain 'the sanction of history' for fascism; that is, thanks to a series of territorial expansions and economic advantages, he aimed to increase his moral prestige and his effective political weight on Italian society to such an extent as to make the regime independent of any non-fascist influences it had hitherto been subject to, such as those of the Church, the monarchy, the economic world and, more generally, the "conservative and xenophile" bourgeoisie and, in a broad sense, the anti-fascists. This thesis of the "sanction of history," in the more general interpretation of fascism proposed by a scholar such as Cofrancesco, leads to the conclusion, which is of interest to us here, that with the war, fascism essentially wanted to escape the "ahistorical' fate that had befallen Spain and Portugal, despite Franco and Salazar, 'solely satisfied with having slowed down the race

towards decline', and instead demonstrate its vitality by imprinting 'its unmistakable seal on the surrounding world"; while in the thesis proposed by Knox and referred to by him in relation to both fascism and National Socialism, he concludes that military victory and the resulting territorial conquests were an indispensable prerequisite for the two regimes to be able to proceed with radical internal transformations, including in the social sphere. There is certainly some truth in both of these interpretations, so much so that they are not as alternative as they might seem at first glance. However, what interests us here is not to delve into interpretative (or, worse, 'theoretical') questions about the phenomenon of fascism, but only to draw attention to one aspect of the basic thesis from which they originate. There is no doubt that victory in the war would have been of great value to Mussolini in terms of both personal prestige and political power, and would therefore have greatly increased his independence and freedom of maneuver with respect to the non-fascist components of the regime (even allowing him in some cases to get rid of them). From here to talking about "sanction of history" and, above all, to believing that Mussolini, however egocentric and full of himself, could really have thought in his heart of a 'sanction of history' in the true sense of the expression (which is the meaning attributed to it by Cofrancesco and, all things considered, also by Knox) is a long way off. The uncertainties, fears, and anxiety (and the related humiliations he accepted) that had initially prevented Mussolini from entering the war and then led him to do so, despite being aware of the inadequacy of Italy's military and industrial preparations, the theory of the 'parallel war' and, above all, his awareness that even after victory Italy would find itself in an extremely difficult position compared to a Germany that had become increasingly strong and launched itself from victory to the conquest of world hegemony, make this clear. 'Sanction of History," yes, but bearing in mind that it would not be a definitive sanction (from the Nazi millennium), but one to be managed once again on the domestic and international levels, and that it could even entail the need, in the more or less short term, to face a new trial of strength, this time with Germany. Mussolini did not have to make too much of a secret of this prospect to some of his most trusted collaborators, if any of them felt authorized to make veiled references to it. The following passage from A. Pavolini's report to journalists on September 14, 1940, is typical: Last time we talked about articles on the emerging economy for the the post-war period or, in general, articles on the structure of tomorrow's Europe. Now, it is advisable to a certain extent to insist on this topic. It was good for us to make the adjustment, but we must be careful not to reach the point where we might believe that the end of the war is so close that we can now talk about it as if it were already over, when we are still in the midst of the war. Secondly, as always in great wars, a mentality is created whereby it is said that what is taking place is thelast war, after which peace will come. However, this long era of peace is by no means predictable, because the seeds of a future war are already appearing on the horizon. We who are responsible and fascists can say these things to each other. Therefore, there will not be the eternal peace that so many hope for and see after the end of this war. This war, like all others, is the penultimate one. In any case, whether or not there will be a future war, it is too early to talk about it, but we must reason as if there were, because we are moving towards a peace that will require a strongly armed nation and a very precise awareness of our imperial and dynamic duties and

dynamic, and which will require us to consider the possibility of war on a daily basis for a long time to come, even if the current war ends soon. It cannot be entirely ruled out that, given his age, Mussolini thought (as, indeed, Hitler himself did at first, for whom the decisive confrontation with the United States was to be the task of the National Socialist "second generation") that the most difficult task of managing the post-war period would fall not so much to him as to his successors and that, therefore, he viewed it with a certain detachment. This does not mean, however, that his certainty of victory led him to underestimate how it would materialize, the situation that would arise for Italy as a as a result of it. The management over time of the fruits of victory, their consolidation, their defense, their possible growth could be the task of his successors; the fruits to be reaped depended (and this became increasingly evident as the war grew longer and harder and Germany became increasingly unscrupulous and intolerant of the demands of its Italian partner) only on him, on his political skill, on his firmness, on his ability to play the 'strong' Punic card at his disposal, his personal relationship with Hitler and the high regard in which the latter held him and which, despite everything, he maintained, albeit increasingly clouded, probably until the end, certainly until July 25. ... The importance Mussolini attached to achieving what he considered to be the primary objectives of his war explains why identifying and focusing on them is crucial for anyone who wants to gain as deep an understanding as possible of his political and military strategy. This applies both to the more strictly and immediately military objectives and to the territorial, economic, and political objectives that victory should have allowed him to secure, or, finally, those which, in his intentions, should have served to establish, to some extent, the premises of his post-victory political strategy towards the Allies, former enemies, neutrals, and the new state (but also psychological-emotional) realities that the war was supposed to bring to the fore. Hence, also the need not to limit ourselves to merely identifying them, but to closely follow their development throughout the entire course of the conflict and to strive to understand their intersection and their impact on political behavior, on Mussolini's strategy and, where possible, on his psychological and moral reactivity, so as to penetrate as much as possible the scale of values and priorities that he actually attributed to them, beyond what he could say in public (and even in private) or argue in political negotiations. And this is precisely what we propose to do in this chapter, analyzing Mussolini's war objectives with reference, first of all, to his two main enemies, France and England, then to his minor (Yugoslavia and Greece) or 'indirect' enemies, the Soviet Union and the United States, before examining them in terms of their impact on relations with his allies and, in particular, with Germany, which was the constant point of reference for Mussolini's objectives, as well as for all his most important strategic, political, and military choices. Let us begin with the objectives relating to France, both because Mussolini had to deal with them first and because, given the particular situation created by the French capitulation and the related armistice agreements signed by the Pétain government with Germany and Italy, relations with Vichy constituted one of the most significant (albeit if little explored by the historiography of the three countries concerned) of those between Rome and Berlin. On June 1, when Mussolini entered the war, he was sure that France was now on the ropes and thought that Italian intervention would hasten its final defeat; however, he certainly did not foresee that its

collapse would be so total and sudden as to induce it to ask for an armistice after only a week and even for the conditions to conclude a separate peace. It cannot be ruled out that if he had foreseen this, he would have brought forward the date of intervention. The statements he made on May 29 at the aforementioned meeting at Palazzo Venezia with Badoglio and the three chiefs of staff explain why Ciano, on June 17, found him "discontented" and "troubled" by the"sudden outbreak of peace" that the news of the French request for an armistice seemed to foreshadow: The current situation does not allow for further delay because otherwise we run greater risks than those that could have been caused by premature intervention. On the other hand, in my opinion, the situation with regard to the so-called allies is definitive... I consider this situation [of the Italian army] not ideal but satisfactory. On the other hand, if we delayed two weeks or a month, we would not improve our situation, while we could give Germany the impression of arriving at a fait accompli, when the risk is minimal, in addition to the consideration that it is not in our moral custom to strike a man who is about to fall. All this, in the end, could be serious at the moment of definitive peace. Aiming for a short war was one thing; finding ourselves having to negotiate an armistice and having to face a post-war situation determined entirely by German weapons was another matter; something that almost completely deprived his intervention in the conflict of justification and made it extremely difficult to assert at the peace table and, later, with former enemies and other countries. In our opinion, this is the context in which we should view the behavior that, at the time, gave rise to completely unfounded rumors, such as that it was the Germans who prevented him from imposing very harsh conditions on the French, and which is still the subject of conflicting interpretations among scholars today. After the fall of Paris on June 14, Paul Reynaud resigned on the 16th and was replaced by Marshal Pétain. The new government immediately decided to request an armistice and even to find out the conditions for peace. During the night between the 16th and 17th, the new Foreign Minister, Baudouin, delivered the request to the Spanish ambassador for Madrid to forward to Berlin. The transmission of the request to Italy was entrusted to the nuncio, Monsignor Valeri, on the morning of the 17th. Due to this delay (almost certainly not, as some have believed, a conscious desire to show contempt for those who had 'stabbed France in the back', but rather a form of courtesy towards the nuncio, who had not been summoned in the middle of the night) and thanks to the greater speed of the Spanish, Berlin had been informed of the French request well before Rome, which had only been officially notified at noon on the 18th, after receiving news from the embassy in Madrid and Berlin and learning of it from Pétain's speech the day before on the radio to announce that the time had come for France to "cease fire" (later corrected for the press to "attempt to cease fire," so as to make the request appear to some extent subordinate to the conditions that the Germans and Italians wanted to impose) and after Berlin had proposed a meeting between von Ribbentrop and Ciano (later extended to Hitler and Mussolini) to discuss the situation. This delay certainly helps to explain Mussolini's "discontent" and "disturbance" and to understand why the "Duce," irritated and wounded in his pride, abandoned the Vatican channel and officially preferred to wait for the French, at Germany's suggestion, to contact him on June 19 through the Spanish channel. However, this alone certainly does not explain his behavior with regard to the substantive political and military

aspects of the armistice. There is not much to say about the more strictly military aspects of this; relatively the "Alpine campaign', there are now a number of reference studies available that offer a sufficiently clear picture of both the operations and the results achieved, as well as the deficiencies of the Italian war machine that these operations immediately revealed. The only question to be clarified is when Mussolini decided to go on the offensive and why, a question that has much more to do with the political than the military aspect of the affair. According to Badoglio, the decision was taken by the 'Duce' on June 15, when, despite his opposition, Mussolini gave him the order to attack on the 18th. Until now, Badoglio's statement has been taken at face value, andMussolini's order has been explained either by the fall of Paris and the Duce's desire to achieve a military success before France was completely out of the game, or as a response to the French naval bombardment of Genoa and Savona the day before. In reality, everything suggests that the 'order' was only given on the 17th, after the first reports of the French request for an armistice to the Germans, and that, as Badoglio noted in the "Historical Diary" of the Supreme Command, it was more of a request than an order and that the planned date for the offensive was not the 18th, but around June 22-23. However, this "request" was followed shortly thereafter, and before Mussolini left to meet with Hitler in Munich, by new orders which, while establishing the continuationpreparation of the offensive, suspended "hostilities with France" "pending clarification of the situation." The suspension was only revoked on the evening of the 19th, upon Mussolini's return from Munich. As for the order to attack the following day, it was given to Badoglio by the "Duce" on the afternoon of June 20, when the French plenipotentiaries were about to leave Bordeaux to negotiate the armistice with the Germans. Equally unclear is the genesis of the armistice conditions that were presented to the French at Villa Incisa, near Rome, on the afternoon of June 23. The French delegates who had signed the armistice with the Germans the day before Germans the day before, but whose entry into force had been made conditional by the latter (in accordance with the "Pact of Steel") on the conclusion of the armistice with Italy, despite the French having tried to argue that there was no need for this 'because the armistice coincided with its declaration of war' and Italy had therefore not fought, were in fact very different from those previously prepared and agreed with the Germans. Based on the available documentation, everything suggests that, taken by surprise by the total and sudden collapse of France, no one, least of all Mussolini, had seriously thought until June 17 of drawing up, let alone a draft armistice,, but not even something similar to a framework (other than the usual demands that had been circulating among the fascists for years and which Mussolini had very briefly outlined in the secret report presented to the Grand Council on the night between February 4 and 5, 1939) of the territorial objectives that Italy intended to achieve at the time of peace and which could begin to be secured at the time of the armistice. If Ciano is to be believed, when he left for Munich, Mussolini was in acontradictory state of mind and lacked clear ideas: The Duce is an extremist: he would like to proceed with the total occupation of French territory and demands the surrender of the fleet. But he realizes that his opinion is only advisory: the war was won by Hitler, without Italy's active military contribution, and it is Hitler who will have the final say. This naturally disturbs or saddens him. Nor did Ciano himself have any clearer ideas, so much so only on the 20th did he set up

an ad hoc body, the Armistice and Peace Office, within the Foreign Ministry. Given this situation, the first draft of the armistice conditions to be discussed with the Germans and submitted to the French was drawn up on the morning of the 18th on the train taking Mussolini and his collaborators to Munich. Ciano, the director Director of European and Mediterranean Affairs at Palazzo Chigi, Ambassador Buti, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the, Rear Admiral R. De Courten, and Air Force Brigadier General E. Ferino. Of the five, the one who had the greatest influence on the drafting of the memorandum, "intended to establish the broad outlines of the Italian point of view on the conditions of the armistice with France," which Ciano immediately presented to Mussolini, must have been Roatta, to whom, not surprisingly, at the Brenner station, the "Duce" personally expressed his approval. Divided into ten points, the memorandum set out the following conditions: Demobilization of the army in all theaters of operation to peacetime strength. Surrender of all collective armaments. Occupation (as far as Italy is concerned) up to the Rhone line. Bridgeheads in Lyon, Valence, and Avignon. Occupation of Corsica, Tunisia, and the French coast of Somali. The right to occupy at any time, until peace is restored, all strategic points and existing facilities in France, in the territories of the Empire, colonies, protectorates, and mandates, deemed necessary to enable military operations or to maintain order. Free use of French communication routes. Occupation of the naval bases of Algiers, Oran (Mers el Kebir), Casablanca. Neutralization and right to occupy Beirut. Immediate surrender of the fleet. Immediate surrender of the air fleet. Surrender of railway equipment located, at the time of the conclusion of the armistice, in the occupied territory. Obligation not to destroy or damage existing fixed or mobile installations in the territories covered by the previous clauses. Obligation to leave all existing supplies of any kind in the occupied territories and localities. Denunciation of the alliance with Great Britain. Immediate withdrawal of British forces operating in metropolitan, colonial, protected, or mandated territories. DisDisarmament and disbanding of foreign military formations (Polish, Belgian, etc.) operating in France. With the sole explicit exception of point 3) and the non-explicit exception of point 5) which could constitute a sort of Italian mortgage in view of a future peace, the memorandum remained, as can be seen, general in nature and had the character of a proposal for a single armistice negotiation, which was, in fact, the Italian point of view at that moment, before it became clear that Hitler wanted two separate negotiations and two separate armistices: certainly because he wanted to give the one with Germany the meaning of 'historic' of a cleansing and a reparation of that of Compiègne in 1918 (hence the choice of location and even the use of the railway carriage in which it had been signed), he could not allow the representatives of one of the then victorious powers, even if now allied with Germany, to participate in it, but perhaps also so as not to put the German and Italian armies on the same level and thus use a "courtesy" to the French. The real political issues of the French armistice and the future prospects of war and peace were discussed in Munich on the afternoon of June 18, first between Hitler and Mussolini and between Ribbentrop and Ciano, then between all four together, and finally with the participation of von Keitel and Roatta. We have various accounts of the talks that allow us to form a clear picture. There is only one point on which it is difficult to comment. The memorandum drawn up on the train by Ciano, Roatta, and their advisers, which Mussolini endorsed in Munich, corresponded to

his state of mindand his extremist ambitions, which must have made it very appealing to him at first glance, or whether he had approved it mainly to gauge German reactions and, at the same time, so as not to appear 'defeatist' in the eyes of his collaborators, particularly the military, and, behind them, the sovereign, who, seeing how things had turned out, had become confident of final victory, had revived his anti-French sentiment and become an extremist, so much so that when he learned that the armistice would no longer provide forthe Italian occupation of French territories up to the Rhone, he would be "very upset"? The question is not unjustified, both because the military hierarchy, contrary to what they would try to make people believe after the war, was inclined to use harsh measures against France, partly for justified strategic and logistical reasons, and partly because they too shared in the nationalist fervor that characterized much of the ruling class and, more generally, the country. It is also difficult to understand Mussolini's drastic change ofMussolini's attitude in the days that followed. In our opinion, this change cannot be explained solely by referring to the changeability of his moods, but must be placed in a broader perspective, in a political logic (not clearly defined, unrealistic in many respects and certainly not free from mood swings, but not to be underestimated for the purposes of understanding his behavior) aimed at somehow dealing with the unexpected situation created, especially in relations with Germany, by the collapse of France just one week after Italy's entry into the war and without the Italian armed forces having contributed in any way, and by the prospect of a very quick peace with England, which, moreover, Hitler, faithful to the ideas already expressed in Mein Kampf, said he was willing to grant on terms, on the one hand, not particularly punitive and, on the other, even involving the "division of the world," which would have greatly reduced Italy's aspirations, role, and room for maneuver, regardless of what the Germans said. In this context, what Mussolini said on the evening of June 24 to Badoglio, Cavagnari, Pricolo, and Roatta when they brought him the armistice agreement signed shortly before at Villa Incisa to Palazzo Venezia: "This is an armistice that is more political than military after just fifteen days of war, but it gives us a good document in our hands." This statement could certainly have been dictated by the desire to justify himself to the military for having completely disregarded their proposals and, in particular, for the failure to occupy (or at least 'neutralize') Corsica and Tunisia, which they had always strongly supported and for which they reproached him, but which, just as certainly, gives us a glimpse of the the entirely political logic with which the 'Duce' dealt with the question of the armistice with France. Mussolini personally drafted a report on the Munich talks in order to inform Vittorio Emanuele III of their progress and communicate his assessments to him upon his return to Rome. Perhaps for this very reason, it is the most summary, vague and, all in all, reticent, so much so that theonly part worthy of mention is its conclusion, precisely because of its generally optimistic tone, but which is ultimately aimed only at avoiding making any binding statements. Regarding the armistice with France: From the long conversation as a whole, I get the impression that there is a desire to quickly settle the war with France on legal and political grounds; the same desire exists with regard to Great Britain, in order to avoid a series of maritime and colonial wars, which would make the 'state of war' chronic, even if fought sporadically and peripherally, and could lead to massive intervention by the United States. Germany could be compared at

this moment to a lucky and daring gambler who has always won while doubling his stakes. Now he is a little nervous and would like to quickly bring home his abundant winnings. As far as we are concerned, we have great sympathy and full recognition, both public and private, for what we have done. The commitment is to conclude, in due course, a peace that will strengthen both of us and that will be guaranteed for a long time by Italian and German forces. Of the other reports from the Italian side, Ciano's on his conversation with Ribbentrop and Roatta's account of the part of the conversation between Hitler and Mussolini in which he had participated, his exchanges of ideas with von Keitel, and what Mussolini had told him during the return journey about the complex of talks, the most important for our purposes is the second. From both of these, as well as from the only German account available, it is clear that, to their great surprise, the Italians found the Germans animated by a spirit of moderation towards France, concerned that overly harsh or dishonorable conditions could lead to the Pétain government's transfer out of metropolitan territory and the handover of the French fleet to the British, and eager to reach a peace with England quickly, to which, as Ribbentrop told Ciano, indirect overtures had already been made. In this dual perspective, the Germans were not thinking of a total occupation of France or of demanding the surrender of its fleet. As for England, Ribbentrop had been explicit: he said that in the Führer's opinion, the existence of the British Empire as an element of stability and social order in the world. As things stand, it would be impossible to replace it withother similar organization. Therefore, as he has also recently stated publicly, the Führer does not desire the destruction of the British Empire. He asks that England renounce some of its positions and recognize the fait accompli. Under these conditions, Hitler would be willing to reach an agreement. England has already been informed of the above through the confidential channel of the Swedish Legation. After thearmistice with France has been reached, decisions for the future will be made. If England chooses war, it will once again be total, ruthless, definitive war until the destruction of England and the Empire. If England chooses peace, Hitler will be happy to collaborate in the reconstruction of a Europe in which order and peace are assured for several generations. As for Italian aspirations, Ciano said he considered "minimal demands' Nice, Corsica, Tunisia, French Somalia, and had also mentioned Algeria and Morocco 'pointing out Italy's need for an outlet to the ocean', Ribbentrop replied that, in his opinion, Hitler was 'in complete agreementwith regard to the former, while he did not comment on the latter, but hastened to remind him of Spanish claims on Morocco and to make a brief reference to "the now historic German ambitions towards that territory." As for the British side of Italian aspirations, Ciano's report reads: With regard to England, I said that we were primarily claiming independence in the Mediterranean, and therefore the demilitarization of British bases in the Mediterranean, namely the return of Gibraltar to Spain and the cession of Malta to Italy. I added that it was our aspiration to replace England in the Anglo-Egyptian treaty and in the Sudanese condominium. Ribbentrop certainly agreed on the question of British demilitarization in the Mediterranean; but he did not give an answer regarding Egypt and Sudan, saying that this had to be examined in relation to future developments in the conflict. Moving on to German claims, Ribbentrop proved, according to Ciano, as hasty as he was vague: Ribbentrop did not give any details about German colonial claims. He said that the

Reich claimed all its colonies, that it considered the Belgian Congo politically and economically necessary for the completion of the German colonial empire, and he also mentioned, but in a vague manner, to the request for other French colonial territories in West Africa. On the other hand, he formally ruled out any request for territories in India, the Dutch East Indies, and Indochina, because such distant possessions would oblige Germany to bear disproportionate and difficult burdens. He added that it is the Führer's plan to create a free Jewish state in Madagascar, where the many millions of Jews who live in the lands of the old Reich and those recently conquered. Apart from Germany's insistence on the inappropriateness of occupying the entire French territory and demanding the surrender of the fleet, Ciano's report would seem to indicate that no other issues relating to thearmistice with France. However, the German report and, above all, the one drawn up by Roatta testify that the terms of the armistice were discussed at length in other meetings. We know from Roatta that Hitler said he was sure that if France did not accept the conditions that would be imposed on it, the German army could reach the Pyrenees in two weeks. In that case, the Italian army would, in turn, have to advance westward, even beyond the Rhône. However, it would not be politically advantageous to invade the whole of France, so as not to encourage the creation of a French government in England or elsewhere. Instead, it would be better to allow the existence of a French government in France, which would be solely responsible. ("If we could have thought that, by not occupying Paris, the French government would have remained there, we would not have occupied Paris"). In this vein, while Italy will impose on France, as main conditions, the occupation up to the Rhone and that of Corsica, Tunisia, and Djibouti, Germany will set the following conditions: occupation of western France up to the south of the Breton peninsula (mouth of the Loire); occupation of central France up to the Loire; occupation of the remaining territory up to the Swiss border with a narrow strip of territory ending at approximately Geneva (where the German occupation troops would be in contact with the Italian troops). In this way, France would be cut off from Switzerland; d) occupation of all French Atlantic ports south of the Loire, and of a strip of coastal territory containing a good railway line of communication between the occupied territory north of the Loire and Spain. (Purpose: to have free rail transit with Spain). The above connection with the Italian occupation troops could take place either in close contact with the Swiss border (as already indicated), or further west, in the event that Italian troops pushed their occupation as far as the Saône. In any case, rail transit of Italian-German troops must be free on a major railway line in or near the contact zone. I have marked the double track line on the Führer's map: Modane-Chambery-Culoz-Ambérieu-Bourg-Dijon. Hitler then mentioned the advisability (already generically provided for at the end of point 4 of the attached memorandum) of Italy reserving the right to military rail transport from the occupied zone to Spain along the Mediterranean coast. With regard to the French fleet, the Führer said that the best thing we could hope for is that the French sink it. The worst thing would be for the fleet to join the British fleet. This is because, given the quantity of French light vessels, the two combined French and British fleets would be able to form numerous secure maritime convoys. (According to him, a convoy protected by 6-8 torpedo boats has nothing to fear). This being the case, England could supply itself without difficulty and bring (from the mother country, Canada, India, etc.) to various locations (from

Egypt to Portugal), maintaining or creating a series of theaters of operation. From here, it is impossible to strike a decisive blow against the enemy ("I much prefer a compact and concentrated enemy, such as France, which I can seize and defeat, rather than enemies who may be weak but are scattered here and there").. That being the case, it is not advisable to ask the French simply to hand over their fleet. They would not agree, and while there is very little chance that they would sink it, there is a very high probability that they would send it to join the English fleet. It is therefore advisable to impose on France the condition that it gather its fleet in a situation where it cannot move or fire, either in French ports under control or in neutral ports (preferably Spanish). Furthermore, Hitler said, it seems appropriate to leave France with the hope of regaining its fleet once peace is achieved. Once England is also defeated and general peace is achieved, we will see. Numerous observations were made by the Duce (for example, that the French fleet, joining the British fleet, instead of escorting to escorting British convoys, it could continue to operate in the Mediterranean). But in essence, the Führer's point of view was accepted. Speaking then of the occupation of part of French territory, Hitler said that it was not advisable to occupy large cities. They require a lot of troops; not only that, but if unrest broke out there, it would be necessary either to evacuate them and then bomb them, or react internally with the greatest energy. This would provoke a violent protest campaign around the world. From this point of view, he is sorry to have to hold Paris and Bordeaux. That is why he did not plan to extend his occupation to Lyon. (General von Keitel said in this regard that it would be better for us not to physically occupy Lyon and Marseille, but to limit ourselves to a peripheral occupation of these cities at a certain distance). Subsequently, other clauses of possible armistice agreements were discussed (disarmament, the advisability of keeping the French administration and police in place in the occupied zones, etc.). Finally, the following was agreed: the Reich will communicate to Franco's government (to which, as is well known, the French government has approached) the conditions under which it would be prepared to conclude the armistice; however, the French government must immediately contact the Italian government to negotiate the armistice with it as well; the Reich will not conclude an armistice, even if France accepts all the conditions it has set, unless a direct Franco-Italian agreement is also reached in this regard; there will be two armistice commissions: one Franco-German and one Franco-Italian; however, the Reich and the Italian government will proceed in agreement both on the conditions to be proposed and, subsequently, on the line of mutual contact, communications, etc. Finally, Roatta's report also provides, as we have already mentioned, a series of other details relating to the part of the conversations to which the deputy chief of staff of theArmy was not admitted and which Mussolini reported to him the next day on the train: The Duce, having summoned me, said the following: the Führer, not wishing to see American intervention and to spend a second winter at war, gives the clear impression of wanting to conclude peace with England in a very short time. He mentioned only vaguely an offensive action against it, as something entirely hypothetical. When asked by His Excellency Ciano, 'What do you want to do with England, peace or war?', Ribbentrop replied resolutely, 'Peace!'... Germany will ask, under the conditions of peace, for: Alsace (to part of which Vosges, near Colmar, will send the emigrated South Tyroleans); the mining basin of Briey; former German colonies; Congo;

something from Belgium. It will retain possession of the main Atlantic ports of Norway. French Morocco would go to Spain, less likely the ocean ports, which would become German. Italy will ask, again during peace negotiations, for Nice (not Savoy, which is beyond the Alpine ridge and French); Corsica; Tunisia and Algeria; Djibouti and British Somalia; a link between Libya and the Empire; neutralization of the two sides of the Strait of Gibraltar. (The Duce did not mention Malta in either sense). Egypt would replace theits alliance with England with one with Italy. The latter would thus have an ocean outlet through the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The report concludes with a note that has been interpreted in historical circles in an antithetical way: [The Duce] asks how many troops might be needed foroccupying France under an armistice. I say that, once disarmament has taken place, ten divisions would suffice. However, more would be needed initially. According to Faldella, the question proves that Mussolini still shared the idea of extending the occupation zone to the Rhône; according to André, on the other hand, it suggests a concern about having to immobilize too many forces in France that could bebe more useful elsewhere. In the absence of any documentary evidence, it is difficult to take a clear position; however, based on Mussolini's modus agendi in similar circumstances, the most plausible interpretation does not seem to us to be that proposed by Faldella: the Duce's question seems rather to us to be aimed at sounding out Roatta's attitude and putting him in difficulty. This is all the more so if we take into account what happened in the days . On the 20th, Badoglio gave Roatta, who had now returned to Rome, "instructions for the drafting of the armistice agreement with France to be submitted to the Duce for approval." The deputy chief of staff of the Army immediately set to work with De Courten and Ferino; within a few hours, a draft agreement was prepared which, in essence, represented only the military's point of view. After the war, General Rossi vaguely mentioned an "agreement" with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, butbut this statement is not confirmed either in the ministry's documentation or in Ciano's diary5 and is indirectly but authoritatively refuted by the statement made by Amedeo Giannini, one of the most important advisers to Palazzo Chigi: When I heard about the armistice negotiations, I immediately prepared a few economic and financial clauses to be included in the agreement. But they were not followed up. I was told that they did not appear necessary. Any insistence seemed useless, given the mood of the negotiators and the urgency of events. According to Roatta, the text of the agreement, which was "perfectly in line with what had been decided in Munich," was ready and was approved by Badoglio and submitted at around 11:30 a.m. to Mussolini, who, again according to Roatta, would have approved it in turn. Faldella adds an additional element to the narrative of the hearing at Palazzo Venezia: Mussolini would first have approved the agreement, then, informed that the full text of the German agreement was on its way, he would have postponed the meeting until the afternoon. From this, it seems logical to deduce that he postponed the approval. What is certain, however, is that in the evening, shortly before 8 p.m., the German agreement was signed. German text was on its way, he adjourned the meeting until the afternoon. From this, it seems logical to deduce that he postponed approval. What is certain, however, is that in the evening, shortly before 8 p.m., Badoglio and Roatta were summoned to Palazzo Venezia by Mussolini (who had meanwhile read the German text), who informed them that the conditions set out in their draft agreement had

to be modified: the Italian occupation zone would be limited to the territories that Italian troops had conquered in the meantime. This meant no occupation of the region up to the Rhône, no occupation of the line connecting with the Spanish border, no occupation of Corsica, Tunisia, the department of Constantine, the French garrisons of Tibesti, Chad, and Ubangi-Shari, the naval bases of Algiers, Oran, Mers el Kebir, and Casablanca, and French Somalia, as provided for in the text prepared by the General Staff. Roatta, again according to his own account, tried in vain to get Mussolini to reverse his decision; what the military ultimately managedwas the creation of a demilitarized zone fifty kilometers west of the occupation line and the demilitarization of the strongholds and naval bases of Toulon, Bizerte, Ajaccio, and Mers el Kebir. On the evening of the 22nd, Badoglio and Roatta brought Mussolini the new text of the agreement, which would be submitted to the French delegates the following day, obtaining theirapproval. In the early afternoon, however, the "Duce" had already informed Hitler of his decision with this telegram: In order to facilitate the acceptance of the armistice by the French, I have not included in the clauses the territorial occupation of the left bank of the Rhone, Corsica, Tunisia, and Djibouti, as we had proposed in Munich. I have limited myself to the minimum, i.e., requesting a demilitarized zone fifty kilometers deep. I consider this a minimum requirement, also to avoid incidents. For everything else, I have adopted the clauses of the German armistice. As we have already mentioned, on the afternoon of the following day, at Villa Incisa, negotiations between the two delegations began: at 7:15 p.m. on the 24th, the armistice agreement was signed and the Germans were informed immediately afterwards. On the basis of this reconstruction of the political and military events surrounding the armistice with France, let us now try to understand what Mussolini's motives might have been. We have already said that we can now rule out the explanation that, at the time and for some time after the end of the war, was widely accepted and contributed to increasing, in public opinion and even in certain fascist circles, the disappointment and criticism immediately aroused above all by the failure to occupy Nice and Tunisia, namely that it was Germany that imposed such a moderate attitude on Italy towards France. On the German side, there was a strategic-political discourse tending to emphasize theopportunity to reach an effective armistice with the French that would completely isolate England and could help push it towards peace negotiations. In this context, pressure was exerted on the issue of the fleet and a possible German-Italian armistice occupation of the entire French territory. However, neither in Munich nor afterwards did the Germans raise any objections to the Italian requests to occupy certain territories in France and Africa. If anything, it must be said that if the Germans did raise an objection, it was to make it known, after Mussolini's telegram to Hitler on June 22, through von Rintelen, that they considered it inappropriate for the Italians not to extend their zone of occupation along the Franco-Swiss border to join it with the German one and thus isolate France from Switzerland. Rome was unable to satisfy this request because it arrived when the French had already become aware of the Italian conditions. Similarly, as has already been said, an explanation based entirely on the moodiness of Mussolini's behavior and the frustrations aroused in him by the failure of the offensive on the Western Front. Even if we do not want to admit that on June 20, when he gave Badoglio the order to attack the next day, Mussolini had already made up his mind, the fact remains

that around noon on the 21st, when he blocked the text of the armistice agreement brought to him by Badoglio and Roatta, he certainly could not foresee the failure of the offensive. To understand the behavior of the "Duce," it is therefore necessary to look for other reasons, which, ultimately, can only be political. However, these certainly do not include the reason given by Roatta, according to whom Mussolini did not intend to impose conditions on France that it would probably refuse, not recognizing itself as defeated by us, and that he did not want to run the risk that the Führer might one day reproach him for not having been able to conclude his own armistice because of Italy's exorbitant demands. Accepting the German point of view regarding the inappropriateness of a total occupation of French territory by Axis forcesand demanding the surrender of the fleet, under the conditions that Italy had said it wanted to impose on France, there was nothing "exorbitant" for the Germans; apart from a few additions made on their own initiative by the military (Constantina, the garrisons of Tibesti, Chad, and Ubangi-Shari), which Mussolini could reject without affecting the substance of the armistice agreement, the Italian demands had not met with any objection from Hitler. Given the state of collapse in which the French found themselves and knowing (since it was stipulated in Article 23 of the agreement signed with the Germans) that their refusal would have meant that the armistice with Germany would not come into force, is in fact unthinkable, and there is no reason to believe that Mussolini could have considered such a possibility. It is also unlikely that Mussolini was thinking of a reconciliation with France and that he had been encouraged in this direction, as some have thought, by the news, transmitted to him in Munich, that entrusted with the task of informing Rome of France's desire to know the conditions of peace, Baudouin had emphasized the new French government'swith the task of informing Rome of France's desire to know the conditions for peace, Baudouin had emphasized the new French government's willingness to "cooperate with Italy in the interests of Christian and Latin civilization." Despite its anti-German significance, the French foreign minister's proposal could not win Mussolini over for a number of reasons: because accepting it would have risked clouding his relations with Germany; because, personally, he distrusted the French; he was irritated and "disappointed" by the fact that their unexpected and sudden military collapse had forced him to enter the war earlier than planned and to face a situation that was as unexpected as it was difficult to deal with; and, finally, he could not forgive them for the "betrayal" of Lavai in 1935-36, which he considered to be the cause of everything that had happened; and, above all, because, in his plans, it was France that would have to make the greatest sacrifices for the benefit of Italy, so it was unthinkable that Italy could in any way tie its hands with regard to France. This was all the more so because, even before hearing it from Hitler and von Ribbentrop in Munich, he was well aware that one of the major points of friction with the Germans in the postwar reorganization would be their plans to establish themselves in the western Mediterranean, a threat that he could only try to counter by playing the card of Italy and Spain's "right" to take over from France in North Africa. Finally, another aspect of the problem cannot be underestimated. However convinced he was that the war would now be short-lived, Mussolini should not have deluded himself into thinking that England would surrender immediately, nor should he have truly wished for this, given that in such a case Italy's contribution would once again

have been practically nil. From this perspective, the real decisive front on which to commit fully, both for the Axis as a whole and for Italy in particular, was for him the Mediterranean: once the umbilical cord of the Mediterranean had been cut, England would have to surrender and its empire would be shattered by a chain reaction of centrifugal tendencies. But in order to win the war in the Mediterranean quickly and decisively (and to win it without resorting toGerman help), it was necessary to occupy French North Africa. Mussolini was and remained convinced of this, both when he thought he could wage war in the Mediterranean on his own and when he had to resign himself first to accepting and then to soliciting German help. Characteristic of this is what he said to Victor Barthélemy, one of Doriot's closest collaborators, towards the end of 1944: Where he [Hider] was wrong was in June 1940, when he allowed the British to re-embark. And, at the time of the armistice, in agreeing to conditions that were too lenient for France. It was necessary to occupy the Mediterranean coast, it was necessary to occupy Tunisia,Algeria, and Morocco, with the help of Spain if necessary. Spain would have marched at that moment. I had proposed it. Others in Germany had also proposed it: Göring, the sailors. Hitler didn'twanted it. He was already thinking about Barbarossa. He didn't know what the Mediterranean was. He never understood the importance of this sacred sea, the most important in the world! He doesn't feel the Mediterranean! One thing, therefore, must be clearly understood: even though he renounced his initial plans for extensive occupations and refused to consider all the arguments, even the most strategically valid ones, put forward by the military to persuade him not to not to deviate from them and escape their maneuvers to force his hand, Mussolini did not renounce what he considered to be Italy's "unrenounceable' Italian claims against France (just as, at least initially, he did not cease to hope that an opportunity would arise to occupy French North Africa) and merely postponed presenting them until England had also 'given up' and peace had been concluded. In short, his renunciation went no further than abandoning the idea of securing preventive territorial pledges. The documentation on this subject is vast and irrefutable, even though to date there has been no study of Italy's war objectives and, more generally, of how Italy conceived of thepost-war 'new order' and the place and role that Fascist Italy should have had in it, and on which he acted to counter National Socialist plans and assert his own vision, or at least to carve out his own space within it. This documentation, together with what is reported in some diary-like works such as Alberto Pirelli's Taccuini, offers a rich picture of Italian plans for territorial expansion and political and economic penetration throughout the war (practically until the loss of North Africa) and of the studies carried out by various ministries in relation to them (around mid-July 1940, Mussolini, partly due to Pirelli's exhortationsPirelli not to be caught off guard by peace and the post-war period without having adequately studied the problems, as had happened in 1919, instructed Ciano to confidentially initiate the relevant studies. Ciano set up an ad hoc interministerial commission chaired by himself and composed of representatives from the ministries of military affairs, finance, communications, corporations, trade and currency, and industrial and agricultural confederations agricultural confederations). This clearly shows how Rome was constantly monitoring every manifestation or even mere symptom of German intentions, especially those of a colonial nature. At the center of this picture was essentially the French colonial

empire. In mid-July 1940, Mussolini envisioned the following for Italy's futureItaly: Italy will get: Corsica and Nice (Varo)... Malta. In North Africa: Tunis and perhaps part of eastern Algeria with a border starting from Constantine and the Ouenza mines (iron) and going to Lake Chad. Not the rest of Algeria; not Morocco. Influence over Egypt, Sudan, Palestine, Syria, Transjordan, and also Iraq and the east coast south of the Arabian Peninsula, including Aden. French and British Somalia. Not Kenya. Influence over Yugoslavia and Greece. Cyprus to Greece, in exchange for the cession of Corfu and adjustments to the Albanian border. Others cherished more ambitious dreams. At the Italian Ministry of Africa, there were those who also thought of full possession of Sudan, Kenya, and even "a colony already under exploitation" such as Nigeria (under direct rule or "independent," but within "Italian living space") with the relative 'territorial contiguity' through Ubangi-Shari and Chad with Italian North Africa. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was only formally more realistic: the 'issues to be studied' with a view to future peace with France and England were immediately identified by the Armistice and Peace Office and submitted forapproval to Ciano on July 4, 1940, show the spirit that animated it. However, Mussolini never shared these fantasies and never looked beyond the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. He agreed with only one point, namely that the greatest sacrifices in favor of Italy had to be made by France. And this was not only in 1940, when the end of the conflict seemed near and it was unthinkable to imposeEngland conditions that would have made negotiation impossible and could have provoked a reaction from the United States, but also later, when a rapid conclusion to the war was no longer conceivable. In short, Mussolini not only did not envisage reconciliation with France, but wanted to impose a punitive peace on it and was thinking of an armistice that would establish the principle and premises for this: hence his firm approval of the memorandum prepared on the train to Munich by the military and Ciano. It was only in the Bavarian capital that he began to change his mind about the terms of the armistice, but not about the nature of the peace and its concrete territorial aspects. It was the Germans who made him change his mind. Not so much with their arguments against a total occupation of French territory and a demand for the surrender of the fleet, the validity of which was difficult to deny from a tactical point of view, but rather by their completely unexpected attitude against a punitive armistice in general. This attitude must have raised concerns in him about the future peace, especially since, even disregarding his personal state of mind and his essentially Mediterranean vision of Italy's future, Hitler's intentions towards EnglandEngland could justify even the most pessimistic predictions, namely that during the peace negotiations even part of what the Germans were saying at that moment about theagreement he was demanding would be lost during the peace negotiations. These concerns must have become more pressing when, on the 21st, Mussolini was able to form a more precise idea of the armistice conditions that the Germans had presented to the French. Faced with such a German attitude (and, we repeat, completely unexpected) and which could be confirmed in some way by Berlin's scant, if not non-existent, interest in Spain's intervention in the war, which he could only explain by the fact that Madrid was demanding, in addition to some extensions of its possessions on the Atlantic coast, French Morocco andOranese, Mussolini had to fear that Germany would not act against France on the basis of tactical and contingent considerations, but would aim for

a reconciliation between the two nations, which Italy would inevitably pay for in all respects. Hence, in our opinion, the change in Mussolini's position with regard to the French armistice. If Berlin wanted to reach out to France, the only thing to do, in his view, was not to appear more intransigent than Germany and, indeed, to show himself to be more understanding, so as not to drive Pétain into its arms, and, at the same time, to try, on the one hand, to please Hitler, so as to make it more difficult for him to renege on the commitments he had made to him, and, on the other hand, to oppose in every way possible the reconciliation between Germany and France. In this light, a series of statements and positions taken by Mussolini immediately after the armistice and theattack on July 3 by the British fleet on the French fleet at Mers el Kebir (which provoked a wave of resentment against England in France, to the point that even within the government there were those who wanted to take the field against it, and strengthened the tendencies in favor of collaboration with the Axis and especially with Germany) which, otherwise, would appear to be in contrast with his attitude a few days earlier, except by resorting to the usual explanation of the moodiness of Mussolini's behavior. The diaries of Ciano and Bottai in particular offer two testimonies that, in their unambiguity, clearly document the true attitude of the "Duce" towards France and give a glimpse of his motivations: Ciano (July 5): The Duce gives me instructions for the trip to Germany... he is concerned that France is trying to slip imperceptibly into the anti-British camp. He fears that this could deprive us of our spoils. Bottai (July 6): Council of Ministers... Mussolini mentions France in connection with the announced constitutional changes. "We must be wary of France, which is now preparing to play the trick of asking for the card. We must not be taken by surprise. I have warned our German friends, who were beginning to be moved by generosity towards the vanquished. Vanquished how? Very easily. Once the crust was broken, the German armies marched through butter. Look at their war films: no deaths. They only destroyed, in a way I would describe as seductive, the large centers of the north, in order to breakFrench industrial organization. But the blow to France's already shaken vital efficiency failed. Perhaps due to a secret, dark instinct for life, the French felt it was better to remain above ground and not go underground. They thus saved the future. They will have to be reprimanded in the peace treaties. I will take care of that. Let's hope the Germans don't fall for it. There are traces of sympathy for France among them. Theater, literature, and science have had their effect. And that these were not mere outbursts is demonstrated by the fact that Ciano, sent to Berlin by his father-in-law immediately after Mers el Kebir, not only conveyed to Hitler Mussolini's concerns about the "French attempt to insinuate themselves into our camp and thus escape the consequences of the policy pursued so far," but also put forward the proposal to begin "consider the idea of a separate peace with France." This idea, as Hitler immediately pointed out to him, was completely unfeasible, since it would have led to the British occupation of the French colonial territories that Germany intended to take possession of and would have deprived the latter of control of the French coast, which was essential for operations against England. However, it shows how concerned Mussolini was that the deterioration of Franco-British relations would lead to the prevalence of the most fiercely anti-British and pro-Axis tendencies in France and, thus lead France to side with the Axis, which would have made it difficult to impose harsh conditions on France at the peace

table. This was the same concern that led him to reject Roatta's suggestion to take advantage of the favorable moment to approach the French in order to obtain the collaboration of their troops in Tunisia in operations in Egypt. As Roatta reported to Graziani, Mussolini rejected the suggestion "not wanting to put himself in a position where he would then be unable to make territorial demands at the peace talks." Moreover, Mussolini's entire policy towards France, while motivated in part by the dual concern of making reconciliation between Germany and France as difficult as possible and of trying to contain the German push to establish itself in French North Africa, was primarily, at least until when the military situation allowed it, the goal of punishing France, of not renouncing Italy's "sacrosanct" Italian rights and, if possible, to secure them even before peace was achieved. Less than a week after the armistices came into force, on June 29 in Wiesbaden, Roatta and von Stülpnagel agreed on the general guidelines for their implementation, in particular for the demobilization and disarmament of the French armed forces and the delimitation of the areas of competence of the two armistice commissions. However, the British attack on the French fleet at Mers el Kebir (followed on July 7 by the attack on the Richelieu at Dakar) led the Germans to temporarily accept the French request to waive the application of the naval and air clauses. The Italians complied with the decision and in turn agreed to the request to temporarily postpone the demilitarization of North Africa and Syria, while rejected the same request for Somalia. At the same time, Badoglio took advantage of the strengthening of anti-British tendencies led by Lavai and Admiral Darlan (on July 5, Gibraltar was bombed and various possible actions were examined, against Gibraltar, Freetown, and to free the units surprised by the armistice in Alexandria), he instructed General Pintor to ask the French if they were willing to grant the Oran air base "to assist" their actions against the British fleet. However, when the French responded positively and the Germans in turn requested bases in the Oran and Casablanca areas, as well as the use of the Tunis-Rabat railway, some Mediterranean ports, and French ships to transport supplies to Moroccan bases, the "Duce," who was already concerned, as we have seen, that France was preparing to "ask for the membership card' and was working to thwart an attempt by Baudouin to meet with von Ribbentrop, took the whole matter upon himself, instructing Alfieri to let the Germans know that their request compromised "our political line towards France, which must be one of intransigence, which would no longer be possible if France were to show us solidarity, even if only passive." So everything came to nothing, especially since Pétain, concerned about the extent of the German demands, backed down, and the Germans, for their part, lacked a clear policy towards France and, more generally, towards everything concerning the Mediterranean, and were really only interested in the systematic exploitation of the French economy. Mussolini wanted to return to the line of intransigence as soon as possible. The anti-French crescendo in his letters to Hitler between mid-July and mid-October is eloquent: July 17- Here, we are following French policy very closely, which is not clear, especially in the colonial possessions. August 24: France. I am sure you have not failed to notice the extraordinary psychological phenomenon typical of the unyielding French pride, whereby France does not consider itself defeated. Vichy France is counting on British resistance and American intervention. What is happening in North Africa indicates the intentions of the French government. We

must therefore keep a close watch on it and impose peace conditions that will render it harmless for at least a few generations. October 19: Our informants, and I believe yours even more so, are unanimous in stating that the French hate the Axis more than before, that Vichy and De Gaulle have divided the spoils and that the French do not consider themselves defeated, because they say they did not want to fight. Vichy is in contact with London via Lisbon. The vast majority of them are placing their hopes in the United States to secure Britain's victory. With this mood, one cannot expect their collaboration. Nor should one seek it. If this were to happen, the French, having denied their defeat, would believe and make others believe that the victory over Great Britain was due to them and them alone, and they would be capable of presenting us with the bill. Having therefore discarded the idea of French membership of an anti-British continental bloc, I nevertheless believe that the time has come to establish the metropolitan and colonial physiognomy of tomorrow's France, reduced, as you rightly wish, to proportions that will prevent it from dreaming of expansion and hegemony once again. dream of expansion and hegemony. Let us begin with the population. The 1936 census gave a total of 41,950,000 inhabitants in France, of whom 2,700,000 were foreigners and 2,300,000 had been naturalized recently or long ago. That is five million non-French people. Of the 850,000 Italians who formed the largest of foreigners, I am repatriating 500 a day and hope to reach a total of at least 500,000 in a year. I calculate that your and my territorial acquisitions will take another 4 million inhabitants away from France. The peace treaty should therefore reduce and will reduce Badoglio's personal note: "I received Gen. von Rintelen, who told me that Pétain has appealed to Hitler, begging him not to send troops and aircraft to Casablanca. Hitler has not yet replied, but Keitel believes that the French are massing troops in North Africa and want to hide the situation that would ensue from us. I shared this opinion and assured him that I would appreciate any worsening of the conditions imposed on the French in North Africa." See ddi, s. IX, V, pp. 248, 470 and 7 20 ff. eia to a population of 34-35 million inhabitants, with a tendency to decline further because I consider a demographic recovery of the French people highly unlikely. As for the metropolitan and colonial acquisitions advanced byItaly, are, as I have said, very modest: they are limited to Nice, Corsica, and Tunisia. I do not count Somalia because it is a classic desert. These are the demands that could have been discussed even before the war, if Daladier's recklessness had not responded with his "jamais" , which were presented to me as a basis for discussion for the maintenance of Italy's non-belligerence. Furthermore, with the financial and economic issues related to the war settled, Italy is not making and will not make any further demands on France. The question now is whether the time is ripe for this clarification of relations between the Axis and France. I would be very pleased to hear your opinion on this essential point. A French request for an extension of the exemptions granted after Mers el Kebir was thus almost completely rejected in August, and it was decided that the disarmament of the air and naval forces should resume on September 1. However, this decision was soon to prove soon proved to be practically unenforceable. The Anglo-Gaullist attack on Dakar (September 23-25, 1940), the Anglo-Iraqi conflict and British operations in Syria (May-July 1941), the bombing of Sfax, and the peripheral operations of the Free French made it impossible to fully implement the relevant clauses. As a result, Italy essentially only achieved the demilitarization of the fortified works

on the Alpine and Libyan-Tunisian borders, the reduction of the metropolitan army to 50,000 men and that in North Africa to about 140,000 (instead of the 100,000 planned) and a first delivery, by 1940, of military equipment (72 trains). The meeting in Montoire between Hitler and Pétain (October 24, 1940), held in the new climate created by Lavai's growing influence in the Vichy government and the failure of the Führer's talks with Franco the day before, seemed for a moment to deal a serious blow to Mussolini's plans, despite Hitler's reassurance to the Duce in Florence on October 28 that it did not imply 'no change in the situation' and explained that his attitude towards France was motivated solely, on the one hand, by the Axis' interest 'in the Vichy government maintaining control over the French empire in North Africa', thus relieving it of that task, and, on the other hand, by the psychological effect that 'the solidarity of France" would have on the "British world" faced with the formation of "a compact continental bloc" against England. But we will return to this later, because although this was the reality of Hitler's policy towards Vichy, it appeared very different to Mussolini in October 1940, so much so that it aroused his greatest fears and prompted him, as we shall see, to attack Greece. The temporary collapse, in mid-December, of Lavai's fortunes and his policy of collaboration, which occurred at a time when Hitler was increasingly focused on his plans for war against the USSR, leading him to view relations with Vichy essentially from an economic perspective, was a breath of fresh air for Mussolini, all the more welcome given the internal and international difficulties in which, as we shall see, he found himself as a result of the failure of operations against Greece. This led to a hardening of his attitude towards France, which the military hierarchy generally shared psychologically but rationally considered not without danger, so that they were inclined to avoid overly marked displays of intransigence and, if possible, to try to soften relations with the French in order to obtain concessions that could alleviate the difficult military situation in Libya. The first very cautious steps to influence Mussolini in this direction were taken in January 1941; however, it was not until May that the situation began to show signs of movement. The Germans, now on the eve of attacking the USSR, did not want any worries behind them and, as far as England was concerned, were interested in creating difficulties for it by supporting the Arab movement in the Middle East and intensifying their actions in the Atlantic against British traffic. To achieve these two objectives, they were interested in being able to use French bases in Syria and West Africa. Hence their renewed willingness to meet, at least to a certain extent, Vichy's demands for a revising the armistice regime and letting the Italians know in no uncertain terms (especially at the meeting held in Merano on May 13-15 between the presidents and secretaries-general of the two armistice commissions with France) that it would be desirable for Italy to be more conciliatory [towards France] be more conciliatory, less rigorous and, even within the limits of armistice control, oriented towards collaboration rather than opposition, which gives rise to frequent friction even on matters of secondary importance... The essential goal to be achieved is to defeat England... France's collaboration is very useful in attractingformer enemy into its orbit in an anti-English function; perhaps even to make it a subordinate ally in the sense of using its fleet and air force at the appropriate moment.... What is certain is that, whatever means of pressure it intends to use, Germany can hardly hope, in the current state of affairs, for France to spontaneously join the fight against

England. Not even the French fleet, tested at Oran and Dakar, seems prepared to fight against its former ally... The situation in Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco is only partially affected by that of the mother country. It is in fact strongly influenced both by the impossibility for the Axis powers to exert immediate pressure on those territories and by the considerable strength of the armed forces granted to North Africa, which make it possible to parry any eventuality. Weygand now has at his disposal an army of 120,000 men and an air force of about 1,000 aircraft of all types; the fleet, with the Strasbourg group, can make its presence felt in the Mediterranean if necessary. Overall, North Africa is in a position to cope with British threats and also, if necessary, to take action against the Axis powers which, has so far been inspired by absolute loyalty to the Pétain government, could tomorrow become independent to the point of leaning towardsEngland. Weygand seems to have North and West Africa well under control: he opposes de Gaulle but at the same time does not hide a clear tendency to resist any further constraints that might be imposed on him on the basis of the armistice clauses.Given the general situation as it appears from the information available to this Commission, it is necessary to consider the attitude to be adopted in the application of thearmistice. The Convention of June 24 has in fact undergone numerous changes, favorable to France, with numerous concessions granted, albeit on a temporary basis. Perhaps it would be useful to draw up an additional protocol that would confirm the results achieved and the concessions made, establish the interpretation given to the various clauses, and establish a "modus vivendi" for the current armistice which is being extended indefinitely. However, as is obvious, this can only result from preliminary agreements with Germany and from political directives that are beyond my competence. These directives will enable me to specify the line to be followed in the further application of the armistice, for which I express theadvice that it is not currently advisable to proceed with strict intransigence, given the reactions that could arise" (acs, Min. Marina, Gabinetto, 1934-50, b. 178). See the report on his work drawn up by General Grossi for the Supreme Command on May 18, 1941, in aussme, Ciaf, b. 51. this purpose and... therefore the Axis powers must be prepared to make all possible concessions as France proves its concrete loyalty in providing this cooperation; concessions that above all put France in a position to defend itself against British attacks. Von Ribbentrop repeated the same recommendation to Ciano on June 15 in Venice. The French, in turn, intended to exploit the favorable moment to obtain concessions not only in the military field, but also in the economic and, above all, political fields. To this end, while still considering Germany their key interlocutor, they were willing to take some cautious steps towards Italy as well. However, the Germans were absolutely opposed to economic and political concessions, so when the talks moved on to actual three-way negotiations (in Wiesbaden in November-December), these first dragged on inconclusively for weeks, then foundered, much to the irritation of the Germans, on the shoals of an intransigent French declaration that they would not continue if the political issues were not resolved before the military ones. On the Italian side, the first step (albeit cautious in form) to induce Mussolini to soften his position towards France in the wake of the Germans was almost certainly taken on July 9, 1941, by General Vacca Maggiolini in a letter to General Cavallero. After reviewing the French situation from both a political and military points of view and made a brief but significant reference to the possibility that the

French would be well disposed towards Italy if it softened its position, the new president of the Armistice Commission with France concluded as follows: In the current state of affairs, I therefore think that it is inevitable that we too should move towards a policy of détente with France and that we should therefore: welcome any steps that Admiral Darlan, as I mentioned, might take to negotiate with ItalyItaly; take note with satisfaction of the favorable disposition that France apparently has toward the treatment of our compatriots; and, for our part, avoid any action or attitude that might alarm public opinion. But I also think that, at the same time, we must view French moves toward us with some suspicion, even while encouraging them; take care that they are not repeated elsewhere, especially inNorth Africa; maintain, on the part of the CIAF, a very firm stance on essential issues, while yielding on some details in order to demonstrate that Italy has no intention of renouncing the fruits of its war sacrifices. On August 4, following a meeting in Munich with the Germans, which had allowed him to ascertain how hostile they were to political concessions and to realize that, this being the case, it was out of the question for France to renounce the fruits of its war sacrifices, Vacca Maggiolini responded to this démarche after a meeting in Munich with the Germans, which had allowed him to ascertain how hostile they were to political concessions and to realize that, this being the case, it was out of the question that France would grant bases in Tunisia to the Axis, he followed up with a second one in which he supported theopportunity of a united front with the Germans, but reiterated his conviction that it should be based on an agreement on the "political premises" and said he was ready to explain his reasoned point of view in detail to Cavallero and Mussolini himself. Various facts, and one in particular, suggest that Mussolini had already been considering the opportunity of a "breaking the ice" with France. In early May, a close associate of Pétain had cautiously sounded out one of the Italian members of the Armistice Commission, Giuseppe Vitaliano Gonfalonieri, to try to understand whether Rome would be willing to change its anti-French stance. Ten days later, on May 13, Ciano's chief of staff, Anfuso, sent Gonfalonieri a memo "containing the thoughts of the fascist government" as a "higher order" and a rule of conduct: Italy's demands on France are as follows: Nice, which we claim for historical, geographical, and national reasons. The border must be moved to the Var. We are willing to grant the right of option to French citizens who wish to remain French. Corsica, to which we are entitled on the same grounds as Nice. The Corsicans will also have the right of option. Djibouti (French Somali Coast), which can no longer be separated from the Italian imperial system, but in whose port we are willing to grant France the facilities necessary for its colonial needs. Tunisia, where Italy must replace France from a political point of view, since it was the Italians who created Tunisia. Italy will ensure peaceful coexistence and economic activity between the two populations in Tunisia. We do not intend to claim Savoy. If France pays Italy this debt, the Duce is willing to restore substantial and fruitful cooperation with France in both the economic and political spheres, so as to allow France to resume its rightful place in European stability. If, on the other hand, these issues are not resolved, Franco-Italian cooperation will be absolutely impossible. Not only that, but the dispute will sooner or later lead to a solution by force. In and of itself, it was certainly not a big step forward on the road to détente, but considering Mussolini's starting position, it was not insignificant either. The situation in North Africa, especially the

insufficient unloading capacity of the ports of Tripoli and Benghazi during and after the Italian-German counteroffensive in March-April, must certainly have been a decisive factor in persuading the 'Duce' to authorize it in March-April: if the Tunisian ports had not been available, it would have been very difficult to seriously consider the offensive on Alexandria and Suez that Mussolini had always aimed at in order to dismantle the British Empire and which now, with the bases in the Peloponnese and Crete and the Middle East in turmoil, he felt was increasingly necessary, urgent, and "decisive."And, of course, in the following two months he must have felt urged to push a little further further, on the one hand, by his meeting with Hitler at Brenner on June 2, from which he must have returned convinced that Vichy's involvement with the Axis would not be at Italy's expense, since once the war was over, France, if anything, would be compensated at England's expense, and, on the other hand, by his irritation with the Germans for their claim to deal with Vichy alone, without first agreeing anything with Rome and informing it only summarily of the negotiations, and artificially inflating French resistance to grantingItaly the use of bases in Tunisia in order to secure them for themselves. Thus, on July 12, receiving General Vacca Maggiolini (whose analysis of the French situation he had read three days earlier) in the presence of Cavallero, he declared that he approved the course of action presented to him and, according to the general's subsequent statement, also authorized him to negotiate with France "to obtain, in return for ourapplication of Article X of the Armistice Convention, a payment of several billion francs, which Italy had, absolutely needed in the short term." The most important step, however, was taken by Mussolini on August 15, after reading and reflecting on what Vacca Maggiolini had written to Cavallero on the 4th and after listening to what Vacca Maggiolini himself had told him, summarizing a lengthy memorandum written ad hoc in which it was stated in no uncertain terms that if... France is indispensable to us, then we must decide to free it from the armistice regime, free it from the thousand constraints that hinder its normal existence and reduce its military capacity, and give it some solid guarantees for its future... The clearest means could be this: to make peace, assuring France, from now on, a large part of the English colonial spoils, so that it may find compensation for the territorial concessions made toItaly: concessions that it could accept all the more easily if a way could be found, through economic concessions or even political adjustments (e.g., the reconstitution of the territory of Nice into a county and its personal union with the House of Savoy), to sugarcoat the pill for French public opinion... I recognize, however...that moving towards this radical solution could be extremely dangerous: if France refused to accept our and Germany's claims, our very offer of collaboration, on such terms, could be enough to persuade the Vichy government to take sides against us, abandoning metropolitan France and taking refuge in the arms of Weygand and Nogués across the Mediterranean. We must therefore see if there is a less risky solution. A radical solution could, of course, be to complete the military annihilation of France without further ado. But since we do not have the possibility to do so (not as regards the metropolis, but with regard to North and West Africa), the situation suggests, in my opinion, that a compromise should be reached between the Axis and France, albeit of a temporary nature and less radical than that mentioned above. In my opinion, we could negotiate openly and resolutely with France on the following basis: allow it to exit the current painful armistice regime, without allowing

it to blossomemerge, as it would probably like, into a definitive peace. This could be achieved by replacing the current Armistice Agreement with another special agreement that is broader and more generous and better suited to the present circumstances, but above all by creating a completely new situation that is neither armistice nor peace. The current war has already seen the emergence of 'non-belligerence' as a sub-species of neutrality: we could now find the term (but more than the term, it is important to find the substance) suitable for a state of affairs which, I repeat, is no longer an armistice, much less a war, but is not even peace, despite having all the characteristics of peace and even allowing France to engage in acts of genuine military collaboration with the Axis. Guarantee France, without specifying for the time being the sacrifices it will have to make, adequate colonial compensation for its territorial renunciations (for example, a lump sum in the form of a credit line to compensate for what Italy would have risked losing). The relevant negotiations, conducted by A. Giannini, were successfully concluded in November. 1 See it in aussme, Ciaf, b. 3, dated August 13, 1941. promise it, if Japan did not oppose it, the protectorate or a mandate for the use of Versailles in India?) In the meantime, immediately restore France's full freedom, return its prisoners, abolish occupation costs, etc. Establish full and loyal military cooperation with it, giving the Axis the possibility of using its armed forces, its bases, its territories, its ports, and ensure France the defense of its current possessions. I believe that this collaboration could and should include the German military occupation of the French Atlantic coast, an occupation that theAxis clearly cannot renounce in any way. Even without the benefit of hindsight, the realism of these bases for negotiation appears doubtful, to say the least. What is certain, however, is that Mussolini found himself in overall agreement with the president of the Armistice Commission. This is attested to by the minutes of the meeting drawn up by Vacca Maggiolini himself: After hearing my summary presentation (in accordance with the written memorandum I handed him), the Duce declared that he completely agreed that the current situation with France was illogical and unsustainable. As for the solution to the problem, the Duce stated that it should be divided into two parts: metropolitan France and the colonies. Any decision on the colonies could be postponed until the end of the war. There would then be, on the ruins of England, ample opportunity to satisfy France in return for our demands. For metropolitan France, however, the problem cannot be postponed. France also has the right to know, in supporting the Axis policy, what the future will be for some of its provinces. It is therefore necessary to settle Western Europe definitively and immediately. Belgium and Holland, in their current constitution, represent elements that are not well settled. In Belgium, there are clear differences between the Flemish and the Walloons in terms of race, language, customs, and religion, which amount to aversion. King Leopold has declared that he no longer intends to reign over two such disparate peoples. It is therefore necessary to enlarge Holland by assigning all the Flemings to it and to assign all Wallonia to France, which in some respects is more French than Brittany and some other French regions. Thanks to this enlargement in the northeast, France could agree to cede the County of Nice and Corsica to Italy. In terms of territory and population, the exchange could be roughly equivalent. The Duce adds that for Nice, a similar solution to that decided for Ljubljana could be adopted. For Corsica, which is very Italian geographically and ethnographically, this would not be the

case. At most, an option could be granted to those islanders who, feeling French, wish to leave Corsica. To my observation about the advisability of immediately surpassing Germany in concessions to France, the Duce objects that Germany is distrustful of us. This must be taken into account. Therefore, in conclusion, the Duce instructs me to see Admiral Duplat and tell him that, in talks I had with some people in the political world, I had the personal impression that Rome would be willing to reach a definitive settlement in Western Europe with mutual concessions and exchanges of territory, from which France would perhaps have nothing to lose overall. Twenty days later, however, Mussolini took it all back. Having returned a few days earlier from his trip to Russia, during which he had met Hitler and explained his point of view on the "abnormality of relations" with France, receiving in response two blunt statements, one of "antipathy" and "distrust" towards the French, the other on the advisability of "postponing real talks for now because it is necessary to remove any hope and illusion from the French that the campaign against Russia is unequivocally defined," the "Duce" convened General Vacca Maggiolini on September 5 and informed him that "the time is not yet ripe for reaching agreements with France" and that "the Führer and the German government do not place too much trust in the men of Vichy," without mentioning that Admiral Darlan's recent statement that France would never lend itself to "bartering of peoples" ruled out negotiations on territorial concessions that would compensate for Italian claims. That being the case, all that remained was to wait until the spring of 1942, when, once the game with Russia was over, "the German army would be available to resolve the conflict" withEngland and, in any case, "France would then cease to be dangerous and would be at our mercy." Until then, France must not cause us any trouble, especially in North Africa. It would indeed be very serious for us if the French attacked us from Tunisia at a time when we were heavily engaged with the British towards Egypt. We must therefore sedate France so that it remains quiet. It is up to you to maneuver skillfully to achieve this goal. Show yourself to be friendly and willing to negotiate... I will summarize my instructions to you in these words: "Juggle until June 1942 ." However, by the following November, playing it safe had become not only difficult but impossible. On November 15, taking advantage of the opportunity offered by their participation in the funeral of General Huntziger, who had presided over the French delegation that had signed the armistices, both Darlan and Pétain adopted an attitude toward General Vacca Maggiolini that had been unthinkable before. The marshal, after blaming the mistakesby France towards Italy and proclaiming himself his friend and convinced that an agreement between the two countries was "fatal," he defined their rapprochement as his "strongest desire" at that moment. The admiral went even further: he made no secret of his hostility towards England and, making sure that the Germans present could not hear him, said: "General, we must come to an understanding between ourselves. The marshal believes in the new Europe; I believe in it too, but we need to agree between ourselves. I am sure that if I could speak to the Duce, theagreement would easily be reached. But I cannot ask for the meeting. Let Mussolini let me know his desire to talk to me and I will be happy to meet him." A few days later, the British launched their second offensive in Libya, during which a serious transport crisis with Libya arose (62 percent of the materials and fuel shipped did not reach their destination), which ended up rendered almost secondary the fact that at the end of

December the Axis troops managed to block the British troops at Agedabia. Hence the urgent need for Rome to seek an agreement with Vichy that would secure the Tunisian bases. The fate of Italy in Libya, L. Pietromarchi noted in his diary on December 27, depends on the possibility of sending reinforcements to the troops remaining there. Now, from Tripoli, it will be possible to "just about" and, if luck is on our side, ensure our defense. The port of Tripoli can only receive the troops and materials just sufficient to maintain our current positions. But if we want to resume the idea of a new offensive for a return to Cyrenaica, we need closer and safer bases: in a word, we need to have Bizerte and Tunis at our disposal. There is therefore a need for negotiations with France under the most delicate and difficult conditions imaginable, namely under enemy pressure and with the prospect of losing our last African positions. With theAxis in such difficulty in Libya and the Mediterranean, with the Germans in Russia still far from the objectives they had set themselves before winter, and finally with the Wiesbaden negotiations stagnating and heading for failure, the moment for negotiating with Vichy could not have been worse. But muddling through until the war in the east was resolved was too dangerous and, from Mussolini's point of view, it could lead to a situation in which his plans to reconquer Cyrenaica and take the war beyond the Suez Canal would lack even the minimum prerequisites. As for the military, their assessment of the situation was even more negative (although it was generally based on the erroneous premise that the Vichy government was convinced that the Axis would win and that, therefore, it was appropriate to contribute to its victory, even at the cost of "running the risk of British and American hostilities"). France undoubtedly intended to gain great advantages from its rapprochement with Italy, such as, in addition to the cessation of the armistice regime, the renunciation of at least part of Italy's claims and the beginning of cooperation between Mediterranean powers that could counterbalance German supremacy in the future, it was necessary, in order to persuade it to allow the use of Tunisian ports, to be willing not to consider all territorial claims against it as indispensable, or, in the case of colonial claims, to consider solutions "more suitable' to the African environment and 'to possible further European developments', such as the creation of mixed mandates, administered jointly by Italy, France, and Germany and competing to form something similar to a 'Western Euro-African empire'. As for the Supreme Command, according to Pietromarchi, it was "intimately willing to renounce all our claims," and a memorandum to this effect had even been secretly prepared by the offices of the General Staff, which Cavallero had not, however, had the courage to forward to Mussolini. In this climate, on December 1, Ciano met with Admiral Darlan in Turin, who immediately made it clear that his government could not make any concessions regarding bases in Tunisia ("the transport of troops is to be ruled out a priori") because he feared "that any concession made in this regard could lead to an English attack on the French colonial empire and particularly on Dakar," unless an "important quid pro quo" would enable him to "face public opinion, which is very sensitive on this issue." For the rest, the admiral did not go beyond many fine words of no practical value, except for the final request that Italy accredit its own representative to Vichy, possibly an ambassador. "The Germans," he said, "have numerous political, economic, and military channels through which relations between the two countries are handled, while relations between Italy and

France for the past eighteen months have only been handled through the Armistice Commission, which is not the most suitable channel for political matters'. Despite the less than encouraging outcome of this meeting, on the evening of December 25, Mussolini instructed General Vacca Maggiolini to begin political negotiations with the president of the French Armistice Commission, Admiral Duplat. It is difficult to say how much this decision was influenced by pressure from Cavallero and the Supreme Command and the fact that von Rintelen, cornered by Cavallero ('it is absolutely necessary to have the road to Bizerte; we can give up Cyrenaica but not Tripolitania because we would lose the war, not only us but also the Germans"), had raised no objections to asking the French what they wanted in return, and a few days later, on the 20th, Göring had met with General Juin and also raised the issue of the use of Tunisian ports, albeit in a much more rigid manner than Rome had hoped, so much so that, faced with the counterproposals presented in the following days by Vichy in the following days, the Germans abandoned the negotiations, and Hitler, writing to Mussolini on December 29, expressed himself in very harsh terms about France, which in other times would have delighted the "Duce," but now, despite the fact that maritime communications with Libya had improved in the meantime, must have worried him considerably and reinforced his belief that he, not the Führer, was right. However, Mussolini's decision was certainly influenced by the French resolution three days earlier to grant Italy the possibility of limited "camouflaged" supplies, via Marseille-Bizerte, on French ships (which returned empty to Tunisia) of food, clothing, and trucks (200) with which to continue on to Libya, for which the French provided 500 tons of diesel fuel. This agreement in principle followed closely on the heels of the Italian decision to give Vichy a sort of encouragement and proof of its willingness to negotiate by appointing Ambassador Butas plenipotentiary 'politician' in Paris. Two documents clearly show both the state of mind and the military and political objectives that motivated Mussolini. The first is the minutes of the audience on Christmas evening, during which the 'Duce' gave General Vacca Maggiolini the task and instructions to start negotiations withAdmiral Duplat, an audience in which, as usual, Cavallerò also participated. In its central part, we read: The Duce recognizes that this armistice, which has now lasted longer than the war it ended, is no longer tenable and must be replaced with something different that allows France to live and its government to govern. There are four concessions that can and must be made to France in this regard France. The Duce lists them in order of importance: a reduction, for example, to 200 or even 100 million francs per day in the indemnity that France pays daily to Germany for occupation expenses; this concession must be placed first, both because of the importance that the French have always attached to money and because it is the easiest to grant; the return of occupied territories to the greatest extent possible, compatible with German military requirements (Atlantic coast); the transfer of the capital to Paris, since France is governed from Paris, Paris is France, France is Paris; the gradual return of prisoners in inverse proportion to their military efficiency (the disabled first, the officers last) and in direct proportion to their civilian usefulness (farmers first) and spreading the deliveries over time. To these four essential concessions, which concern almost exclusively Germany, must be added, on the part of the two Axis Powers, the concession of rearmament in the AFN and the AOF, so as to enable France to defend itself against British and American

aggression: however, caution must be exercised in this concession to prevent the agreed armaments from one day being turned against us. Territorial issues must not, and cannot, be dealt with at this stage: they must be postponed until peace is achieved. However, it can already be said that the Walloon provinces of Belgium could be fair compensation for France for other cessions of its metropolitan territories, while the spoils of the British colonial empire will be more than enough to satisfyeveryone. Indeed, we must not forget that the Axis Powers would face a very serious problem, perhaps beyond their organizational capabilities and possibilities, if they had to sustain the entire current British empire on their own. While territorial issues must be postponed until the end of the war, the question of the Tunisian bases must be resolved as soon as possible and in its entirety. Given the current conditions of our transport across the Mediterranean and the increasingly limited efficiency of the port of Tripoli, we are now simply unable to supply the forces we currently have in Libya: strictly speaking, they can still be increased by one division (the 'Littorio', which is in fact about to leave), but even with the help promised by the French for the 'camouflaged' use of the ports of Tunisia, we can only keep in Libya the little we already have there. It is now clear that, with such limited forces, we may be able to hold out for a long time on the front we now occupy: in a particularly favorable situation, we cannot even rule out a partial offensive aimed at reoccupying Cyrenaica, but nothing more can be done. Indeed, there is reason to fear that, with increased British pressure, our worn-out forces may ultimately be forced to surrender.Instead, we need to turn the situation in the Mediterranean around as soon as possible by marching on Egypt and the Suez Canal and preventing all British traffic through the Strait of Sicily. This can easily be achieved, provided, however, that we have free access to the Tunisian ports. With the distance between Italy and Africa reduced by a good third (140 kilometers from Sicily to Cape Bon = 10 hours of navigation; 444 kilometers from Sicily to Tripoli = 32 hours of navigation), it is clear that, even taking into account the greater distance of the Trapani-Tunis route from Malta, traffic with Tunisia becomes safe due to its shortness, the possibility of completing it entirely during daylight hours, and better protection from the sea and air. In addition, savings are made in terms of merchant steamers and warships, aircraft, gasoline, fuel oil, etc. Control of Tunisia also ensures the complete interruption of traffic between Gibraltar and Suez: Gibraltar thus loses much of its value in relation to the Mediterranean. That being the case, General, you must obtain full use of the Tunisian ports as soon as possible. Indeed, you must obtain military occupation of Tunisia, so that we can make it a base for our large units, ready to march towards Egypt (and who knows, perhaps we could thus reconquer the Ethiopian Empire during the same war?) and, if necessary, create a front towardsAlgeria. Naturally, France must be assured that such an occupation would be temporary and would in no way compromise French sovereignty in Tunisia during the war. Obviously, the defense of Tunisia against the British would be undertaken by the Axis. The value of Tunisia at this moment is such that, if the French do not grant us its use and the British succeed in advancing into Tripolitania, Italy would be forced to take Tunisia by force, landing its divisions there. I ask the Duce to what extent I can make concrete promises regarding the concessions that the Germans should grant to France. The Duce replies that I should be very cautious in this regard: it is certain, however, that if I were to obtain the Tunisian bases in

their entirety, faced with this concrete and extremely valuable fact, the Germans would have no choice but to agree. Finally, the Duce dismissed me with these precise words: "General, remember this: Tunis today deserves any compensation." The second document is the letter that Mussolini wrote to Hitler four days later, on December 29, to sound out his agreement and possible reactions in the event that thethe Italian initiative was well received in Vichy. Despite its vagueness (no mention was made of the four concessions to France that he had discussed with the president of the Armistice Commission), the letter1 had a firm tone, which Mussolini had not used with Hitler for at least a year, and proposed as a last resortItalian occupation of Tunisia, with all the risks that Vacca Maggiolini had pointed out to him (causing the rest of French Africa to fall into the hands of De Gaulle and greatly enhancing his prestige in France), in terms so explicit as to appear almost blackmailing: Libya. The battle that has taken place in recent weeks in Cyrenaica has ended without winners or losers. We would certainly have won, if we had been able to transport the men and equipment necessary to sustain the battle. The outcome of the battle was compromised at sea, not on land. The loss of theentire convoy of seven ships on November 9 was extremely serious, but no less serious was the loss of two ships on December 14, ships carrying German and Italian tank units that were sunk by a submarine in the Gulf of Taranto. The last convoy of four ships arrived, but to protect the journey of twenty thousand tons we used one hundred thousand tons of warships. This requires such a consumption of fuel that it would be prohibitive to supply the simple resistance in Tripolitania, unless we open the way to Tunis, which is infinitely more economical in this respect. At the time of writing, the enemy's intentions are unknown. Will it be content with its success and, given the situation in the Far East, limit itself to strengthening its position, or will it attempt to break through our new deployment, , in order to target Tripoli? See ddi, s. IX, Vili, pp. 71 ff. In order to avoid the dangers that lie ahead, to enable us to secure Tripolitania and regain the initiative, the issue of the Tunisian bases is absolutely fundamental. I do not need to explain to you the enormous advantages that would accrue to the Axis from the full utilization of the Tunisian bases. I affirm that the strategic situation of the Axis would be reversed. While our traffic of men and arms would be almost undisturbed, the enemy's traffic would be literally strangled. The consequences of this would be incalculable, as incalculable as the consequences of the loss of Tripolitania. There are only two ways to achieve our goal, which is to have free disposal of the French bases in Tunisia: either through agreements or that of force. Of course, everything possible must be done to achieve this through an agreement. France will not give anything for nothing. It will ask for compensation in the armistice and certain military facilities to defend itself. I firmly believe that the game is worth the candle. Through the Tunisian bases, we could bring to Africa all the forces necessary to resume the march towards Egypt and possibly cooperatewith France in the face of Anglo-American reprisals in French Morocco. If the French reject any agreement, even the most generous, I declare to you, Führer, that I would rather take my armored divisions to Tunisia than see them disappear at the bottom of the sea on the route to Tripoli. In general, I think we must find a way to clarify France's attitude towards us. I would be delighted, Führer, to hear your thoughts on the matter. Within a fortnight, Vacca Maggiolini had three meetings with Duplat, on December 30, January 7, and

January 13. The first and even more so the second were quite exploratory, aimed at trying to understand how far Vichy intended to go in its collaboration with the Axis and to reassure it that any Axis presence in Tunisia would not compromise its sovereignty over the region, which would only be discussed after the war. The issues came to a head in the third meeting, whenAdmiral Duplat handed General Vacca Maggiolini two documents, a copy of the 'suggestions' that Vichy had sent to the Germans after the Göring-Juin meeting, summarizing the French demands, not only military but also political, economic, financial, and 'moral', for linking their politics and economy to those of the Axis 'with a view to the organization of the European Community," to facilitate transport to Libya and for a possible joint defense of Tunisia against an Anglo-Saxon attack, and a 'memento' clarifying the 'suggestions'. To further clarify the 'memento', Duplat then declared that the French government was 'determined to march resolutely' with the Axis, but that it could not do so immediately: in order to avoid serious forms of dissent, especially in North Africa, it was necessary to preparepublic opinion, convincing it of the advantages of the concessions requested; in essence, large-scale offensive operations based in Tunisia would not be possible before the winter of 1942-43. For the time being, therefore, it would be the Germans who would pay the price by accepting Vichy's demands, and even before them, it would be Mussolini who, with a long string of unflattering words ("if the Duce, resuming the role for which he always seemed to many French people to have been born, namely to beone of the great directors of the plan for the reconstruction of Europe, wanted to facilitate practical mutual understanding of the dual desire for the future, on the one hand of France, Germany, and Italy on the other, France would certainly respond to his efforts"), he was asked to mediate between Vichy and Berlin but, at the same time, it was made clear (in another round of words, this time more bluntly: "we must not move towards a peace based on territorial amputations, which generate hatred and war") that this did not mean that French opposition to Italian claims would disappear. Under other circumstances, such a statement would have provoked a real outburst of anger from Mussolini: unable to afford this now, he made a virtue of necessity. On the evening of January 14, he told General Vacca Maggiolini, who had come to him for instructions, that "on the whole" he considered the "memento" to be "an expression of acceptable intentions" and a "possible basis for further discussion." Of course, the reference to "territorial amputations" was clear, "but the very expression used by the French allows us to discuss the matter, since what we are asking for is, precisely, the return of limbs that had been amputated from the Italian nation"; for Corsica and Nice "compensation can be offered: the Walloon provinces of Belgium are worth much more in terms of size, population, and wealth," "as for Tunis, we can always accommodate ourselves: there will be plenty of British colonial spoils once the war is won! " "Today, Tunisia is indispensable to us and we must obtain it from France. Without Tunisia, we cannot be sure of keeping Libya. Without Tunis and Libya, we cannot conquer Egypt, and without Egypt, we cannot reconquer Ethiopia during the war, nor can we participate in operations in the Middle East from the southwest." In the following days, he would issue new instructions, but "it is now essential to negotiate as a trio, and I therefore foresee a meeting between the three leaders (the Führer, Pétain, and myself) or the three foreign ministers." In fact, not only would there be no meeting between the three, but apart from a

couple of other minor meetings between Vacca Maggiolini and Duplat, within a month or so theoperation first stalled and then broke down. It was February 1942 when the French announced that shipments via Tunis had to be suspended. The justification given for this decision was the"uncompromising German attitude" towards France, which made it too dangerous for Vichy to ignore the energetic pressure and threats exerted by the United States to stop shipments via Tunisia, and, albeit less explicitly, the fact that Italy was doing nothing to soften Berlin's attitude. Now, if it is true that Hitler was determined not to agree to any political revision of France's condition and had also communicated this to Mussolini on January 16, by von Rintelen, it is also true that other reasons contributed to the stalemate and then the breakdown, reasons that would become increasingly important in the second half of February, March, and April. As far as Mussolini was concerned, there were two main reasons: the improvement in the military situation in Libya and the Mediterranean, which gave him some breathing space and, therefore, more time to make his move on Hitler, prompting him to wait for the French to show their goodwill first by demonstrating their willingness to resume the negotiations interrupted in Wiesbaden; and, however little and poorly informed he was about it, the French political situation was becoming increasingly unclear and, moreover, punctuated by alarming and, for him, sometimes particularly irritating, such as the Riom trial and a series of anti-Italian incidents (involving French military personnel) that occurred mainly in Tunisia and Algeria, and which were widely and, in some cases, bitterly reported in the Italian press. However, the the "Duce," as well as the Armistice Commission with France, almost completely missed the most important background. For him, as he would say again on March 31 to Vacca Maggiolini, the deterioration of the French political situation and the break in February were to be explained by the "dangerous progress of communism in league with nationalism and Gaullism (all fueled by Anglo-Saxon gold)," with the "lack of willpower," with the "incomprehension of its own situation in Europe," with the "persistence of old arrogance and confidence in materialism (industrial and financial power of its own)," and with the weakness and lack of prestige of the Vichy government. This did not mean that one should not "persist in the path followed so far"; however, it was necessary to move cautiously, being "always able to cope with the situation" militarily. As for Lavai's reappearance on the political scene, he did not attach any importance to it, convinced as he was that he was "a man without followers" and that it would be very difficult for him to get the Germans to accept demands that were not substantially different from those made by Darlan. In reality, the deterioration of the French situation and, to a large extent, the break of February 11 were, directly or indirectly, determined or influenced precisely by Lavai's reappearance on the political scene or, rather, by the emergence, in February 1942, first among the Germans, and then also in Pétain, of the idea of getting rid of the overly unscrupulous Darlan (who, in the marshal's opinion, was also guilty of loving the "high life' and for harbouring a cynical contempt for the 'national revolution'). To this end, the Germans used Lavai, a mixture of technicians and clericals Pétain, whose aim was to give his government a 'neutral' character, acceptable to both Berlin and Washington. Hence, when Darlan realized this, on the one hand, there was a gradual paralysis of his political initiative and, on the other, he entrenched himself in the positions he considered most suitable for dealing with the double

maneuver. Neither the Armistice Commission nor Rome had any inkling of this until the very last moment, so much so that the formation of the Lavai government in mid-April took everyone by surprise. The rise to power of Lavai, towards whom, as has been said, Mussolini harbored a deep grudge, the resumption of the German offensive in Russia, and the positive results achieved in Libya by the Italian-German forcesforced the French question into the background and rekindled the Duce's mistrust and hostility towards France. This was all the more so because at the meetings in Salzburg and Berchtesgaden on April 29-30, Hitler and von Ribbentrop also made no secret of their low opinion of Lavai and, above all, their suspicions towards France, as well as their conviction that "no possibility of collaboration should be taken seriously," since sincere collaborators accounted for less than 5 percent of the population and the rest of the French hated the Axis, so that the only thing to do was "to give a bouquet of flowers every now and then" "and keep our eyes wide open so as to be ready to react with the greatest energy to any attempt by the French to bite at the heels of Germany and Italy." It is true that there was no shortage of people in the military leadership who would have preferred a less intransigent attitude than the one Mussolini was now determined to maintain towards France in the second half of April, and even more so with the possibility of finally conquering Egypt and cutting off the Suez Canal. This is evidenced, for example, by the concerns, for the present but above all for the future, that such intransigence aroused in General Vacca Maggiolini and Cavallero himself ("it is my firm conviction that without France it is not possible to create a new Europe and that, on the contrary, we must strive for a Latin bloc to serve as a counterweight to the growing, threatening power of Germany"). However, knowing Mussolini's views, no one dared to contradict him at that moment. A typical example is Cavallero, who was convinced of ultimate victory and did not want to appear defeatist in the face of Vacca Maggiolini's insistence that he reconsider the issue. He replied by urging him to discuss it not with the "Duce," but with the "defeatist" Ciano. Nor, to clarify the attitude of the military, should it be underestimated that even the proponents of a less intransigent and more flexible course of action were plagued by concerns about excessive French military reinforcement and were therefore inclined to refuse to "consider more favorably the desire to defend the empire and in particular the AOF and the NA on the part of the French," coming into conflict with the Germans on this issue, or were irritated and indignant at the increase, especially in Tunisia, of demonstrations of hostility towards the Italians. The difference in approach between the Italians and the Germans emerged very clearly at the meeting between the heads of the two armistice commissions on June 10-17, 1942, in Friedrichshafen. At the meeting, Vacca Maggiolini argued for the need fortotal intransigence and made no secret of the fact that the Italian side considered "any substantial concession aimed at strengthening French military efficiency, especially in North Africa, to be extremely inappropriate and dangerous". At times, the conference took on the character of a confrontation; the Germans, hurt by being treated as naive and gullible, replied that French hostility towards the Axis was justified "also by Italian claims on Tunisia, which are felt very painfully throughout North Africa," prompting protests from the Italians who, through Vacca Maggiolini, retorted that they were "perfectly justified" and that Italy could not renounce them, "because it is precisely for them, or at least also for them, that Italy entered

the war." Nor did things go any differently at the subsequent conference held in Venice from September 22 to 29. Although there were no moments of confrontation as in Friedrichshafen, the gap in the assessment of the French situation and the loyalty of the Lavai government was once again considerable. Despite the fact that operations in Egypt were stagnating and Vacca Maggiolini realistically admitted that time could play more to the advantage of the enemy than to the Axis forces, given that the latter were encountering greater difficulties in receiving new resources and troops from Italy, the conviction continued to be held that if it would be detrimentalFor the Axis to see France take the side of the enemy at this moment would be equally, if not more, inadvisable than seeking its open collaboration in the war against our enemies. In fact, in order to obtain the uncertain and unreliable support of a few poorly armed units on the battlefield, we would have to adapt, against all our interests, to having a companion at the peace table who would necessarily be unwelcome and cumbersome! According to the report by General Vacca Maggiolini (which Mussolini had read and approved in advance on September 17), Vichy's policy of collaboration could not fail to continue to cause concern and, above all, it had manifested itself only in relations with Germany and, in any case, without going beyond "the narrow circle of economic interests." Lavai's government itself did not have the courage to resolutely cut ties with the Anglo-Saxons and avoided an open break with the United States, thereby demonstrating its concern to continue to sit on the fence and not to deviate substantially, on this point, from the wait-and-see policy of its predecessors... There is more: Mr. Lavai is evidently pursuing this subtle policy with great skill, seeking to make the program of collaboration with Germany less unpopular with French public opinion, thanks to the hope, or rather the confidence, that this will serve to settle the threat of Italian claims... Nor are there any lack of open manifestations of the French government's persistent animosity towards Italy: suffice it to mention the recent inappropriateand historically absurd glorification of the Gaul Vercingetorix against the Roman Julius Caesar! Instead of easing tensions, Lavai's actions are exacerbating Italian-French friction-French friction, which, despite all Italian goodwill, could take such forms as to compromise the continuation of the current armistice calm. Given this assessment, according to the Italians, no new elements had emerged in recent months that would cause them to change their previous line of conduct, namely the 'intention to maintain the current status quo in relations between the Axis and France, at least until the political and military situation changes as a result of decisive military results obtained by the Axis on the Eastern Front'. Lavai could only be trusted to a limited and vigilant extent. Thus, while not ruling out the possibility that the Anglo-Americans might attempt to establish a "second front" in the Casablanca area, if Vichy's requests to strengthen its defenses in AOF and Morocco were acceptable, no increase in French armed forces in Algeria, Tunisia, and France. Less than a month and a half later, on November 8, 1942, the Anglo-Americans landed in Morocco and Algeria. On the French side, as Mussolini had predicted, resistance was weak and short-lived, while aid and delaying tactics aimed at gaining time were much more decisive, as, for that matter, the Vichy government had attempted at the very beginning, uncertain as it was about the position to take. Lavai, summoned to Munich by Hitler, von Ribbentrop, and Keitel, in the presence of Ciano, tried to prevaricate and escapeGerman anger, but in vain.

The report of the meeting drafted for Cavallero by General Gandin1 clearly conveys the drama of the moment (made even more dramatic by the false news that the Americans had also landed in Corsica): Minister Lavai began by praising Germany's treatment of France under the armistice. He then went on to describe the obstacle posed by Italian claims to a possible occupation of metropolitan territories and French North Africa. Hitler cuts him off and asks him to answer categorically and immediately whether the French government will allow Axis troops to land in Tunisia. In response to Lavai's prevarications and digressions, Hitler adjourned the meeting. He then called Marshal Keitel and ordered him to prepare arrangements for the invasion of France starting on November 11, beginning the movement at a time to be agreed upon with Italy, which would have to act in the same way in metropolitan France, Corsica, and Tunisia. The urgency of these movements did not allow for any delay. Marshal Keitel explained that in the event the Italian troops, given their constitution, are unable to proceed rapidly, German armored units are already prepared to proceed without delay towards the coast; the German units would return within the demarcation line already established (Geneva-Lyon-Toulouse) as the Italian occupation progresses. At the same time, a note is prepared for the French government, to be delivered simultaneously by the Italian and German diplomatic representatives, and a proclamation addressed to the French armed forces. The Führer also prepares a personal letter addressed to Marshal Pétain. Meanwhile, Minister Lavai, isolated in one of the rooms of the Führerbau, asks to speak to Vichy, but telephone communications are interrupted. His departure is set for the following day, November 11, at around 8 a.m. It is expected that at 7 a.m. on the 11th, Minister Ribbentrop will appear before Minister Lavai to tell him that events have taken a turn for the worse. In fact, a telegram has also arrived from the Associated Press announcing the landing of American troops in Corsica and the occupation of all the island's airfields; the Führer has therefore given the order to march without further ado. It should be added that Minister Ribbentrop intended to issue a statement to the world press saying that the Axis armed forces were entering French territory at Lavai's invitation. Minister Ciano pointed out that this was not very appropriate... On the 11th itself, the first German and Italian troops entered Tunisia and, at the same time, the occupation of French metropolitan territory under the Vichy administration began, including Corsica . In the following days, the Germans tried in vain to persuade Lavai to declare war on England and the United States, after which preparations began for a coup aimed at seizing the French fleet anchored in Toulon. On the night between November 26 and 27, in accordance with secret orders given on the 11th by the Minister of the Navy, Admiral Auphan, the fleet scuttled itself. For Mussolini, all this must have been a tragedy, the collapse of so many of his plans, hopes, and dreams, but, paradoxically, it was also a balm, a sort of dramatic confirmation of his intuition and his superior political ability compared to Hitler. His assessments of the French situation, his conviction that the Vichy regime and in particular the Lavai government were unreliable, proved to be correct. proved to be correct. And with them, his initial reactions to the Anglo-American landing in North Africa, when he wanted to proceed immediately with the occupation of Corsica and mainland France, and to the decisions taken in Munich, when he would have liked to proceed immediately with the capture of the fleet in Toulon. Above all, his conviction that the war should have its focal

point in the Mediterranean proved to be right, a conviction that Hitler had never wanted to make his own. With the consequences that were now clear to everyone and which only he, perhaps, could still remedy... if Hitler had finally agreed to follow his advice... A note by Bottai dated November 13, 1942, is significant in this regard: He looks at me, silently. Then he mentions the "cards we still have to play on the military table." Is he alluding to Corsica and Nice? To Bizerte? And suddenly he argues with the Germans, with Hitler, with a series of "I told you so" statements; and that theBritish Empire could be defeated in Egypt; and that to protect itself from Russia, it would have been enough to make Poland a buffer state; etc. It was as if, in his polemical mind, he were looking for evidence to support a thesis that might one day prove useful. In the last months of the regime, the French problem presented itself to Rome and Mussolini almost exclusively from two perspectives arising from the new situation created by the occupation of the whole country and, more generally, as a consequence of the increasingly precarious course of the war for the Axis: one with a 'realistic' background, the other, on the other hand, with a 'utopian' background, so to speak. Let us begin with the 'realistic' aspect, that is, the modest possibilities, given that the Germans were now behaving as complete masters in France and were willing to leave only crumbs to the Italians, who, moreover, lacked anorganization capable of effectively carrying out this type of work, i.e., extracting from France, its economy, its industrial apparatus, its reserves, and its deposits whatever could be useful to the Italian economy and armed forces. The available documentation on this subject is not very extensive, but it is nevertheless quite significant. The minutes of General Vacca Maggiolini's last meeting with Mussolini on February 12, 1943, are certainly significant. They clearly show that Mussolini was no longer interested in France in real political and operational terms, but was essentially motivated by journalistic curiosity, drawing from the news provided to him only a few ideas for general observations of a 'sociological and political psychological' nature, i.e., confirmation of his previous judgments. Apart from this, his only real interest appears to be the possibility of extracting as much oxygen as possible from France for the increasingly asphyxiated Italian economy. Hence the only instructions given: "It is necessary that you gather everything you can in France, everything you find, and send it to Italy.... So remember my directive: recover as much as you can and send it to Italy." And in this sense, in fact, the activity of the Armistice Commission was essentially directed in those last months, both in person and in its difficult relations with the Germans. Halfway between the "realistic" and the "utopian" aspect is the fact that, despite having taken control of Nice, Corsica, and, albeit in a very different context, Tunisia1 in November 1942, the Italians avoided giving these occupations the character of pre-annexations and, on the contrary, tried to keep the few local irredentists and the more numerous and vocal ones in Italy3 in check to a certain extent, limiting their activities to very small areas and, all things considered, almost purely for show, such as the few local irredentists and the more numerous and vocal ones present in Italy, limiting them to very restricted areas of activity and, all in all, almost purely for show, such as, for example, the celebration, on April 30, 1943, of the now traditional "Nice propaganda day." Vacca Maggiolini, dedicated to the examination of issues relating to theuse of industries, raw materials, and labor, as well as Italian purchases in France. Like the previous one, however, this report had little effect, given that the Germans tended to put

almost all problems on themaintaining the status quo of the situation, which was very advantageous to them, that they had created between November and December of the previous year, generally resorting to the expedient of postponing any decision until further investigation and study. On the other hand, the Germans argued that even raw materials produced in French territory under Italian control were part of 'the general European distribution plan' and that Italian needs had to be 'taken into account in the framework of periodic Italian-German agreements' on the subject (see Aussme, Ciaf, bb. 44 ["Munich Conference"] and 45 ["Paris Conference"]). For Tunisia, see J. Bessis, La Méditerranée fasciste. LTtalie mussolinienne et la Tunisie, Paris 1981, pp. 317 ff. On November 12, 1942, the Minister of Popular Culture, A. Pavolini informed Mussolini that he had given instructions "so that the irredentist activities concerning France, overseen by this Ministry, maintain, with regard to current events, an absolutely sober tone without pointed interpretations and comments, so as not to provoke repercussions that could hinder current military operations" (acs, Min. Cultura Popolare, b. 101, fase. 8). Among the activities mentioned by Pavolini, it is worth noting the newspapers Il Nizzardo and L'idea corsa and the daily radio broadcasts for Corsica and occasional broadcasts for Nice (edited by Ezio Garibaldi, who also edited Il Nizzardo). Posters praising "Nizza nostra" (Our Nice) put up in Menton by local fascists in the days when Italian troops began to move westward were covered up on November 15 by the military authorities with others of a more neutral nature (see P. Molinari J. L. Panicacci, Menton dans la tourmente 1939-1945, Menton 1984, pp. 65 ff.). The irredentism of Nice, unified at the end of 1940 in the Gruppi di azione nizzarda (from April 1941 under the PNF), had several thousand members in Italy, especially in the northwestern regions, most of whom were not originally from the area, and was always largely an artificial phenomenon, kept alive (also from an economic point of view) by the regime. Its undisputed leader was Gen. Ezio Garibaldi. The regime also took particular care of and subsidizedredentismo corso (Corsican irredentism), which, however, also had its own tradition and more real ties to its homeland, so that the Gruppi di cultura corsa (Corsican cultural groups), founded in 1933 by university student Petru Giovacchini, were much less artificial than those in Nice. In addition to the Ministry of Popular Culture, Corsican irredentism was also followed with particular care by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where a Committee for Corsica had been operating since 1924, which was responsible, in Italy, for 'to keep alive, at least in certain circles closer to culture and politics," a feeling of patriotic attachment to the cause of Italian identity on the island and, in Corsica, to "safeguard in its many aspects and by all possible means the original Italian identity of the population" and to "fostering among the Corsicans a feeling of reaction to French rule (autonomism, irredentism, pro-fascism)" (ACS, Min. Cultura Popolare, b. 168, fase. 126, "Corsica"; as well as, P. Giovacchini, Corsica nostra, Rome 1942). During the war between Corsican irredentism and Italy, there must have been relations (including during the occupation of the island in November 1942) which have not yet been clarified and which are evidenced by a number of trials subsequently held by the French courts against both military personnel and Corsican civilians who had carried out irredentist activities in Italy, but also on the island, and which ended with a number of death sentences, at least one of which (against a colonel commanding the Bastia garrison) was carried out (see G. Vignoli,

L'irredentismo italiano in Corsica durante la seconda guerra mondiale. La sentenza di condanna a morte degli irredentisti corsi, Rapallo 1981). This line of conduct cannot be explained solely by the desire not to further exacerbate French national sentiment and, therefore, not to play into the hands of the Allies and the French resistance and not to complicate relations with the Lavai government. Considerations of this nature certainly had a significant weight, as did the fact that, at that moment, a markedly annexationist attitude would have had very little political impact in Italy and could even have been counterproductive in large sectors of public opinion. very little in Italy and could even have been counterproductive among large sections of public opinion. That said, we should not underestimate the weight of another consideration: the desire not to play into the hands of Germans such as the ambassador to France, Abetz, who, partly out of conviction and partly for tactical reasons (i.e., in view of an attempt by the Allies to open a "second front" in France), were toying with the idea of replacing their 'privileged' relationship with Rome, which was becoming less and less useful and increasingly burdensome, with what they considered to be a less demanding and more useful relationship with Vichy. With this in mind, they would have welcomed an Italian misstep that would further strain relations with Rome and allow Berlin to intervene in favor of France. This was a game that, given the "not overly friendly towards Italy" mood that was mounting in Germany, both among large sections of public opinion and in the more extremist circles of the National Socialist Party, could well have succeeded. And this was, in fact, what von Ribbentrop attempted to some extent on April 29, 1943, in Klessheim, during the preparatory phase of the conference in which Lavai was also to take part, when, after stating that the most important thing at that moment was to strengthenLavai's weakened position, as the man "least harmful and dangerous to the political aims of the Axis" and the only one "capable of keeping France in order, that is, able to keep it working regularly, even in the field of war supplies," he mentioned to Giuseppe Bastianini, who had recently succeeded Ciano as undersecretary of foreign affairs, the possibility that Italy might "accommodateLavai (who was worried about the demonstrations that were said to be taking place in Italy to hasten the annexation of Nice) by renouncing "the Rhone demarcation line." Faced with Bastianini's negative reaction and his taking advantage of the opportunity to raise the issue of giving the "New Order" programmatic content that would make it something alive and effective for all peoples (and therefore also for the French), von Ribbentrop, who had completely different ideas about the "New Order," dropped the issue, and when the final communiqué on the talks with Lavai was being drafted, Bastianini succeeded, not without difficulty, to ensure that any reference to the organization of the new Europe "referred to sacrifices and not to advantages." Nevertheless, the extent to which von Ribbentrop's remark must have alarmed Bastianini and, as soon as he was informed, Mussolini, is demonstrated by the fact that on May 1, immediately after Bastianini's return to Rome, the "Duce" hastily summoned the director of the Stefani Agency, Roberto Suster, one of the oldest correspondents of Il Popolo d'Italia, who had repeatedly carried out delicate confidential missions for him in the past and knew Vichy France very well, and instructed him to prepare a note, to be distributed only abroad ("since they would not understand it at home"), "that is humane, courteous, and encouraging, not only for Lavai, but for all French people." The connection between the

"realistic" and "utopian" approaches" approaches with which, in the final stages of the regime, the French problem was dealt with by Mussolini and not only by him, as Bastianini proved even more convinced than he was of the advisability of taking this second path, not only with regard to France, but in general to all Germany's allies and vassals, is well illustrated by the background to this note. His opportunity, as we have seen, was certainly "realistic." Mussolini couldrealistically accept the German point of view on Lavai and his positive role at that moment for the Axis; however, this did not mean that he had changed his opinion of him. Introducing, on May 1, the speech about the note that Suster was supposed to prepare, he expressed himself in terms that leave no doubt: "However one wishes to consider Lavai today, whether as a fire chief or a Levantine merchant (at least in terms of mentality), it is clear that we have a duty to use him, with or without his consent." And everything suggests that with this he wanted to go beyond mere agreement with Berlin's point of view and aimed above all to try to make it more difficult to maneuver Italian policy towards France and discussions such as that between von Ribbentrop and Bastianini. The penultimate paragraph of the note (issued on May 2)1 and in particular its beginning ("without opening any single 'give and take' discussion, without addressing any particular detail, which is in any case secondary today"...) seem to have been conceived precisely in this defensive logic. If the occasion and the main purpose, at least for Mussolini, were "realistic," the note also had a "utopian" aspect , which we feel it is necessary to draw attention to, even though we will have to dwell on it at length later on. We refer to the discussion of the 'New Order' with which the note concluded. This was a topic particularly dear to Bastianini, who believed that the time had come to put an end to the vague talk that the Germans had been engaging in until then about the 'New Order' for the sole purpose of masking 'Germany's military and economic domination of Germany to the detriment of all', and instead to put forward a precise and solemn programmatic declaration (a 'Charter of the European Continent' to counter the 'Atlantic Charter') which, by giving all peoples 'both allies and occupied, as well as enemies' a clear idea of the ideal, political, and economic objectives of the Axis, would represent an elII On May 2, having obtainedapproval of Mussolini, the Stefani Agency issued the following confidential note to foreign services: "Italian public opinion, and particularly Fascist political circles, have welcomed with great satisfaction the news of the visit made by French Prime Minister Lavai to the Führer's headquarters and the talks held there with the participation of Undersecretary Bastianini. After such a long and tormented period of isolation and disorientation, there is a feeling that perhaps France, having learned from experience, intends to bring itself up to date with the current general situation in Europe, beginning at least on a psychological level with a revision of values and attitudes that should lead to a healthy evolution in spirits and in things. Prime Minister Lavai, who was always, before, during, and after this conflict that was to bring France so much pain and humiliation, was the exponent of a concrete realism and responsible activity, intended not to consider the problems of the Third Republic as separate issues, but as details of a general situation, in need of adjustments and reforms, mutual goodwill and unanimous good faith. He undoubtedly emerges from this conference greatly strengthened, both in prestige in the eyes of third parties and in confidence in himself. He, as stated in the final communiqué of the meeting with the Führer, found in the

representatives of the Axis countries not as enemies eager and anxious to vent any thirst for revenge on the French people, but as adversaries aware of their rights and duties, willing to seek together a solution to the present troubles that loom over humanity and particularly over Europe. And therefore, above all, in terms of the spirit that informed it, that the meeting between the representatives of the Axis and those of France is of particular importance, just as it is in the tone of loyal and frank realism in which the conversations took place that the secret of the meeting lies. France, faced with the enormous effort being made by the Axis powers to save, together with their own, its destiny as a civilized and European nation, would condemn itself before history if it limited itself to accepting the benefit without contributing to it, and would no longer have any right to claim membership of the continental family and civilization. Without opening any single game of "give' and 'have', without addressing any particular detail, which is in any case secondary today, it is in fact at this turning point in history that the whole meaning of the war is perfected and broadened, through the ever-new adherence of peoples to that European revolt which distinguishes the war against Bolshevism and plutocratic imperialisms. The Axis powersAxis powers, which, in order to build a new, more vital and united Europe, to achieve a new, more equitable and effective order, and to strengthen their higher and more eternal social ideals, have faced the supreme test of war, have today more than ever the right to be believed in, and to feel that all European national communities are unconditionally and unreservedly on their side. unity against the Anglo-Americans and, together, open the doors to a compromise peace with either them or the Soviets. Although with some difficulty, Bastianini, as we shall see, had managed to get Mussolini to accept his thesis, and it had been put forward at the Klessheim meeting of April 8-10 to von Ribbentrop and Hitler, who, however, had rejected it. Nevertheless, Bastianini returned to propose it again on April 29, managing to insert a very vague reference into the final communiqué on the talks with Lavai, which, if desired, could also be understood as a first, very cautious German step in the direction he hoped for. More importantly, his thesis had found, much to von Ribbentrop's annoyance, Lavai's full consent: Explain what this new order should consist of. It may be that people will like it. And start to establish it, so that you can convince the French of your good will. I bet that if I go to Rome and talk to Mussolini about it, we will agree on how to define it. But if you don't do this, your opponents will have an easy time with their propaganda against you. It is doubtful that Lavai really believed what he was saying, and even more doubtful that, in his realism, Mussolini thought that, at the point they had reached , the 'New Order' card a) could be played by the Germans, b) that, if played, it could serve any purpose. Yet, on closer inspection, even he had a touch of 'utopianism' (but at this point it is perhaps more accurate to speak of unreality or, better still, of a failure to understand the decisive value of the epochal rupture that the war would have for the world and, first and foremost, for Europe), even if it was less elementary, less 'naive' than Bastianini's and was projected not so much onto the immediate, onto how to end the war or, at least, how to get out of it, because in this regard, as we shall see, Mussolini was convinced that the only way forward was a compromise between Hitler and Stalin, but even on the day after tomorrow, on the situation, which was still traditional in nature and which, in his opinion, would be determined at the end of the war, whether it was won by the

Axis, the Tripartite, or the Anglo-Americans. On August 1, indicating to Suster the outline on which to draft the note for Stefani on the Klessheim talks, he told him to flatter and reassure the French: Remember that we have no preconceived hatred and that in politics there are no eternal grudges. Remember that after war there is always peace and that today it is above all this that we must concern ourselves with... France, due to its geographical position, its history, and the potential of its people, must in fact be a party that will not be secondary in the future European order... But, to clarify his thoughts, he immediately added: It is a matter of compromising, to engage both the man [Lavai] and the nation in this sense. Faced with the Germanic bloc, we must find a lowest common denominator that creates solidarity among all Latin races, otherwise we will be, if not overwhelmed, at least enslaved. And that is certainly not why we went to war. Nor is it why Europe is putting up with it. With regard to England, Mussolini's war objectives were, so to speak, more straightforward and remained so, even though they were heavily burdened by the 'temporary' downsizing of those relating to France, to which, as we have seen, the 'Duce' had to resign himself to when signing the armistice with the French for fear that his hardening stance on military occupations would push them towards a rapprochement with Germany, which would ultimately be at Italy's expense. Behind this 'linearity' of political and military objectives lay a very important psychological attitude that was more political and less emotional. AnEven a very brief analysis of Fascist war propaganda reveals an image largely characterized by extreme verbal violence against England and the English, the source and propagators of all selfishness and wickedness, enemies not only of Italy but of the entire human race, subtle masters in the art of divide and rule and of using others against their own interests for their own. So much so that two recurring expressions suffice to summarize its spirit and style: 'perfidious Albion' and 'God damn the English'; the latter coined during those years of the regime, the former derived from a much older and more learned tradition of Anglophobia. It is obviously not possible here to go into the details of this propaganda; but two general observations can better clarify the actual terms of the problem. The first observation concerns its development over time. Until July 25, 1943, three phases can be identified: the first lasted until about mid-December 1940, the second roughly from that date to the second half of 1942, to the definitive reversal of the military situation in North Africa, and a third that corresponded to the last months of the regime and the period of heavy Anglo-American aerial bombardment of Italy. This timeline corresponded each time to an increase in verbal violence at all levels and a gradual decline into vulgarity and, not infrequently, triviality, which was, in part, natural and spontaneous, corresponding to widespread, deep-rooted Anglophobia, which the war in Ethiopia and the sanctions had greatly exacerbated, to the point of affecting even high-level cultural and journalistic circles of a high standard, and partly corresponded to the directives that the Ministry of Popular Culture issued to the press and the mass media. In the first of the three periods indicated, the most important thing was to demonstrate the righteousness of the Italian cause and the inevitability of war in the face of British intransigence in not wanting to make any concessions to the 'young' and 'poor' peoples, and to Italy in particular, and therefore London's responsibility for triggering the conflict. In the second period, when it became clear that the war would be long and difficult, another need was added to that of demonstrating this thesis: to make

Italians aware of this 'truth' without discouraging them and making them doubt the final victory, while at the same time justifying the serious military setbacks suffered in Greece and Africa. Hence the increasing insistence on presenting England "with all its more or less imperial appendages," but at the same time emphasizing the "pirate-like' and inhuman way in which London had built and exploited its empire, in order to insinuate the idea that it was something coercive and fragile, whose centrifugal forces (especially in the Middle East and India, the real strongholds of British world power) were waiting for the ongoing war to provide the right opportunity to manifest themselves and rise up against British imperialism. Finally, in the third period, these objectives were superseded by the much less sophisticated one of trying to combat the fatigue and mistrust that were now spreading in ever-wider circles of the country by simply sowing hatred towards the enemy and the British in particular; attributing every evil to them was intended as a terrible warning: if the British won, Italy, its civilization, and its very chances of survival would certainly be at the mercy of British 'perfidy' and 'exorbitance', extolled by popular culture and almost always personally by the minister (see ACS, Min. Cultura Popolare, Cabinet, bb. 75-77). Until Italy entered the war, the Nupie, Nuclei di propaganda all, reporting to the Ministry of Popular Culture. With the entry into the war, the NUPIE was left with sole responsibility for propaganda abroad, particularly anti-communist propaganda (Center for Anti-Communist Studies). Domestic propaganda, on the other hand, was transferred to the National Institute of Fascist Culture, which had its own fairly extensive peripheral organization. The NUPIE Central Office remainedwas entrusted with the development of general political directives and the preparation of technical and bibliographic material and specific conference outlines, which were then used by the local branches of the ICNF and also disseminated through hospitals, health resorts, rest stops, and armed units, as well as the publication of the illustrated weekly magazine Fronte, intended for combat troops. more from thehatred and desire for revenge aroused by Italy with its independent policy first, with its victorious challenge to England in 1935-36, and with its participation in the war. The second observation is that, especially in the first two periods, but also to some extent in the third, this propaganda campaign was, among the various ones undertaken by fascism during the years of the conflict, the one that, all things considered, achieved the greatest results. Since it is impossible here to go into a detailed explanation of this fact (for which it would be necessary to consider a whole series of factors, such as the pre-existence, as mentioned, of an Anglophobic cultural tradition, both secular and Catholic, revived by the war in Ethiopia and by the sanctions and useless petty British harassment of Italian maritime traffic in the months preceding thethe intervention, the lack of direct knowledge, at the popular level, of the British and England, a country with little Italian labor emigration, the widespread use by the British of colonial units and the Dominions, often considered to be of color or, in any case, 'barbaric', the often counterproductive effects that, in the early stages of the war, had British radio broadcasts to Italy, both because of the false news they contained and because they used exiles, which hurt a certain patriotic sensibility that was still alive and well, as we have seen, even in circles critical of or opposed to fascism and the war, etc.). We will limit ourselves to noting that the few studies conducted on the letters and diaries of combatants and the fallen, the most truthful memoirs, and the censorship of correspondence reveal that

only in relation to the British was the war truly felt by large sectors of the population, especially young people, of the country, and that there were forms of contempt and hatred that were absolutely not found towards other enemies. Personally, Mussolini was not immune to forms of elementary Anglophobia and resorted to expressions such as "the people of five meals" and, in particular circumstances, enjoyed quoting the negative judgments expressed about their compatriots by some great figures in English political and cultural history. Only at the end of 1942 did he begin to use expressions such as "hyenas in human form," to speak of "brutes" and "barbarians" towards whom one had to be ruthless, just as "Rome, which was merciful after victory, was ruthless when it came to the existence of the Roman people," to appeal to historical episodes such as the "betrayal' and the hanging of Admiral Caracciolo by Nelson and the 'betrayal' that led to the capture and shooting of the Bandiera brothers, and to openly incite hatred of the enemy ('You cannot wage war without hating the enemy. You cannot wage war without hating the enemy from morning to night, at all hours of the day and night, without spreading thishatred and without making it the intimate essence of oneself") and, first and foremost, the British. However, it would be wrong to believe that his feelings toward England were, at least until he felt his back was against the wall, dominated by hatred or even contempt and underestimation. Whatever he said, the reality of the British Empire, even though he now considered it on its last legs, undermined by too much prosperity, excessive wealth, the demographic crisis of the British people, and the centrifugal forces that were taking shape on its periphery—the way it had been established and had even managed to resist Napoleon instilled in him a sense of respect that he did not have for other nations, certainly not for France 'corrupt and petty-minded' and, on closer inspection, not even for Germany, which he admired and envied for many reasons, but above all feared and disliked. It was no coincidence that for years his foreign policy had essentially moved within the framework of British policy, and even when it had collided with it, this had been more due to a miscalculation than to his explicit will and, in his opinion, more due to the "betrayal" of the French and Lavai in particular than to that of the British. So much so that, once the Ethiopian game was over, he had long hoped to reach a "general agreement" with London that would have allowed him to secure a hegemonic position in the Mediterranean and at the same time mend relations with England. And in this hope, not realizing that he had by then lost all credibility in London's eyes, he must have lulled himself even more and for longer than the available documentation proves, but some fragmentary pieces suggest. If one Mussolini's personality and themoodiness of some of his reactions, even with regard to the war years, it is difficult to speak of his most intimate and profound attitude toward England as being dictated by a state of mind similar to that which he harbored toward France. Rather than hatred, it seems to us that we should speak of a sort of disappointment at what he perceived as London's lack of understanding of his situation and his true intentions. Despite all the weight that must be given to this kind of belated confession-outburst, see Mussolini, XXXI, p. 130 (December 2, 1942), we find it significant in this regard what he said to I. Fossani in March 1945 during what is commonly known as the "soliloquy on the island of Trimellone": Before signing the Pact of Steel, I tried every possible means to reach an agreement with the other side... England did not want us. It wanted our neutrality and our ports at its disposal, and all

this, that is, the mortgaging of our future and our dignity, for a miserable plate of lentils. When I saw that there was nothing to be done, I allied myself with Germany. Our geographical position is outside the orbit of neutrality. Either we accept war or we become a camp for enemy armies. In the latter case, we would have to accept the terms of the victors.nothing to be done, I allied myself with Germany. Our geographical position is outside the orbit of neutrality. Either we accept war or we become a camp for enemy armies. In the latter case, we would lose the right to be a nation without even the advantage of avoiding the disasters of war. As for the man who can rightly be considered his greatest and most direct enemy in the war, Churchill, we must go even further. While recognizing him as such and despite being harshly attacked by him, Mussolini never substantially lost the esteem and human sympathy that he had always felt for this sanguine and rock-solid man, whose open-mindedness, perseverance, proud tenacity in pursuing his ideas, and ability to make plans in terms of great historicaland political terms. He considered him not only a worthy adversary, but also a man who was in some ways similar to himself. After the very first moment, when it seemed that the collapse of France would also bring about the end of the struggle on the part of England, but even before the conviction that the war would be short had faded, Mussolini saw England as the enemy against which all Italian and Axis energies would have to be concentratedall Italian and Axis energies, an enemy to be respected, not to be underestimated at all, and from whose defeat Italy would achieve some of what he considered to be the primary and effective objectives of his war (compared to which those at the expense of France became secondary, if not in and of themselves, as they were made not only possible but effective by the achievement of those at the expense of England), and above all, hegemony over the Mediterranean and freedom of access to the oceans. With regard to these objectives and their defense against the interference, misunderstandings, and different ideological perspectives of the Germans and Hitler, for him, any other objective, even those concerning France, which until its collapse had been considered a priority by Mussolini, was to be judged erroneous or secondary or pursuable only in terms of achieving victory over England. The fact that Mussolini did not behave consistently with this conviction in the case of the war against Greece isseparate issue, which can essentially be explained by the evolution of relations with Germany after the planned German landing in England was shelved; however, this issue should not lead us to believe that he abandoned his overall vision of the war and its fundamental objectives. It is worth repeating that these remained anchored in his mind to the idea of a decisive and then deadly confrontation between Italy and England to be fought in a single theater, which in his eyes was the real stake: the Mediterranean. The idea thatEngland might resign itself to negotiating peace, which spread immediately after the French request for an armistice, based mainly on reports from Swedish sources suggesting that there were two tendencies in London: one, represented by Churchill, determined to continue the war, and the other, centered in the Foreign Office, in favor of negotiating, and that the latter might prevail, lasted very little. By the end of June, it had practically vanished; what had not vanished, however, was the certainty that the war would last only a few more months, and no longer. The German landing in England was in fact considered certain and imminent, and no one doubted its success. Of the two prospects, this was certainly the one preferred by Mussolini.

As we have already had occasion to say, even though he had staked everything on a short war, one in which the British would immediately surrender, with noItalian contribution would have been negligible, he could not in fact hope for it. It was therefore better that the war should continue for some time and that the British should not be immediately defeated by the Germans, so that he would have the opportunity to achieve success in Africa and, if possible, take advantage of the German commitment against the British to secure an effective position of strength in the Balkans (but we will return to this, as this initial intention was then replaced by his fear of German political and economic penetration in this region) and also participate in some way in direct action against England. It is widely believed that it was this multiplicity of intentions, combined with the fear of going to Egypt to face a defeat similar to the one he had suffered in the Western Alps, if the forces and, above all, the resources available in Libya had not yet been strengthened, by Badoglio and even more explicitly by Graziani (who, after Balbo's death on June 28 in the skies above Tobruk, had added, much to his chagrin, since he considered his appointment a maneuver by Badoglio to remove him from Rome and prepare his ouster from the army leadership to the functions of chief of staff and commander of the troops stationed in Libya), to lead Mussolini to believe that the most opportune moment to go on the offensive in North Africa would be when the Germans landed in England. However, this explanation is only partially valid, as it does not take into account certain facts that must be considered. Whatever the reason, what is certain is that of all the military decisions taken by Mussolini during the war, very few, if any, would have had such negative consequences as this one. Awaiting the German landing amid a barrage of conflicting reports, which one day said it was imminent and a few days later postponed the start date, one day they reported that everything was ready and the Germans were just waiting for a series of days with suitable weather conditions for large-scale use of the air force, and a few days later they reported that the air preparations had not achieved the expected results and had resulted in a heavy loss of aircraft and pilots, not to mention those who from time to time attributed the failure to start theaction to secret Anglo-German talks aimed at resolving the conflict. In fact, the second half of June, July, August, and part of September. During these months, Mussolini was repeatedly seized by doubts (around July 1, after Ciano's meeting with Hitler and von Ribbentrop in Berchtesgaden at the end of August, and when he received a letter from Hitler on September 17 after two months of silence) that the landing might not take place, at least for that year. So much so that on August 28, rectifying his previous orders, he informed Badoglio of "his decision to have Marshal Oraziani launch the attack even if the German attack does not take place." Despite this, until September 28-29, when General Marras, from Berlin, transmitted the news of the definitive demise, at least for that year, of the planned landing, no real military decision was taken by Mussolini or proposed to him by Badoglio. Nor did Oraziani's troops in North Africa, who in mid-September had finally pushed a hundred kilometers beyond the Egyptian border and occupied Sollum and Sidi el Barrani, would not move from the positions they had reached until December 9, when the British counteroffensive began, leading to the annihilation of the 10th Army and General Wavell's troops on the Gulf of Sirte, beyond Benghazi. In this way, more than three months were lost that could have been militarily valuable and, if well used, could have yielded very important

and perhaps decisive political results. At the beginning of the second half of June, when Germany's victory seemed certain, General Franco, who, despite his prudence, continued to cultivate the ideals and myths typical of an old colonialist, as he had been until the civil war, would have been willing, in order to restore a true empire to Spain and thus strengthen his own internal prestige, to silence concerns arising from the difficult internal political and economic situation and the unpreparedness of the army, which had emerged exhausted from the civil war, and to enter the war alongside the Axis. On June 12, following the Italian precedent, he proclaimed, instead of the pure and simple neutrality to which Spain had adhered until then, 'non-belligerence' and two days later he occupied (albeit after secret contacts with the Allies, whom he had led to believe that he was doing so to avoid an Italian occupation) the international zone of Tangier. Having taken these preliminary steps, he then sent General Vigón, Chief of Staff of the Army, to Hitler to sound out the German attitude, outline the difficulties and risks (not least that of British or American action in Portugal or Morocco) to which Spain would be exposed if it intervened, and to request substantial economic and military aid. And, of course, to make it clear that Spain's territorial claims would go far beyond Gibraltar, which had never been concealed. Vigón's mission was followed on June 19 by a memorandum in which the Spanish laidtheir cards on the table, demanding recognition of their future possession of Gibraltar, the 'reunification' of Morocco (in the form of a protectorate), the region of Oran, and a series of extensions of the borders of Rio de Oro and Spanish Guinea. The day before, the Spanish ambassador in Rome, P. G. Conde, had communicated these requests to Palazzo Chigi, and in the following weeks, Madrid made it known to Palazzo Chigi that it was prepared to intervene militarily in French Morocco and in 'certain areas' of Algeria in order to guarantee order there, which was endangered by the demobilization imposed on the French by the armistice treaty. However, all these advances fell on deaf ears. Hitler, confident of victory, eager to avoid difficulties with Vichy, and, moreover, interested himself in setting foot in Morocco, did not follow up on them, nor did Mussolini do anything to persuade him to listen to his collaborators, especially the military, who, on the other hand, realized the great prospects that the Spanish card (even if in practice reduced to the possibility of crossing Spain, occupying Gibraltar, passing into Africa, and using the Canary Islands bases) would open up for the Axis. And this was not only in June, but also in mid-August, when Franco, who was beginning to have doubts about the victory of the Axis and its speed, and was the subject of pressing Anglo-American diplomatic action aimed at keeping him out of the conflict, wrote to him to solicit his solidarity with regard to Spanish territorial aspirations, offering him "the most absolute reciprocity of our support for your expansion and your future," and asking him to intervene with Hitler for a positive response. Only at the beginning of the second half of September, following the abandonment of the invasion of England and the visit to Berlin by the Spanish Minister of the Interior (and shortly thereafter the Minister of Foreign Affairs) Serrano Suner, did Hitler finally consider the Spanish card and, writing to Mussolini on September 17, say he was "convinced that it may be important to make possible Spain's intervention." Von Ribbentrop said the same thing in the days immediately following during a brief visit to Rome. In reality, however, Hitler's "conviction" was far from firm: while he was ready to provide the requested economic and military aid, the Führer

was not willing to make specific commitments regarding Spanish claims except for Gibraltar and, moreover, he wanted the cessionone of the Canary Islands, Spanish Guinea, and the island of Fernando Poo. Finally, he was not so convinced of the importance of Spanish intervention that he was willing to make a serious effort to persuade Madrid to break the deadlock. At that moment, still possible given the influence of the most radical Falangist circles in Spain. So much so that Ciano, who spoke to him about the problem in Berlin on September 28, had concluded that he was actually opposed to Spanish intervention "because it costs too much for what it can yield." That being the case, Mussolini and Ciano, despite the postponement of the landing in England, had created a completely new and unexpected situation, preferred to limit themselves to mildly supporting German diplomatic action on Madrid, without trying to force Hitler to accept Spain's colonial claims, which were a real conditio sine qua non for Franco to intervene. And this was despite the fact that at Palazzo Chigi and even among the military leaders (Soddu), there were those who realized that time was not on the side of the Axis, much less Italy. Encouraged by Graziani's "leap" made by Graziani to Sidi el Barrani, they believed it was necessary to act immediately and thoroughly to dismantle British power in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Typical in this sense, despite a certain underlying simplism, is the following entry in L. Pietromarchi's diary under the date of September 24, just a few days after von Ribbentrop's meetings in Rome in which, as mentioned above, there had been talk the opportunity to bring Spain into the war: For Egypt, after the advance from the Libyan border to Sidi E1 Barrani, the great decisive battle against the entrenched camp of Marsa Matruck looms. Whoever loses loses everything, forced to retreat from the field of defeat to their starting bases some two hundred kilometers away across the desert, bombarded by the victor's air force and pursued by their motorized columns. It will therefore be a do-or-die battle, a desperate battle which, as in the climactic phases of history, will decide the fate of one of the two contenders. The battle of Marsa Matruck will therefore be the salient event, the central point of the war. If the fortunes of war turn in Italy's favor, the Suez Canal will be unblocked, the AOi forces will rejoin the Egyptian forces, Palestine invaded, the oil resources of Iraq and Iran taken from the, the prestige of the latter will be destroyed, and the Mediterranean will be freed from British power because the Home Fleet, deprived of any support, will be forced either to risk everything in an attack against our bases or to abandon the mare nostrum. That day will go down in history as one of the most important political dates for our country and for the entire Mediterranean world. If, after Suez, the cornerstone of Gibraltar also falls, as the Germans assure us, the war will be fought outside or on the margins of the European continent. What prospects will England have of saving itself and reemerging from such a colossal disaster, even if the air, naval, and financial power of the United States tries to support it? It will find itself increasingly unable to harm at least one of its adversaries, the one that is sheltered in the center of the Mediterranean and which, from that convenient base, can continue to dismantle piece by piece the entire British dominion in Africa. But what really mattered was the German attitude. So it is more than understandable that, faced with this, the failure to land in England and Italian passivity in the Mediterranean, Franco's already considerable perplexities and fears increased, while the chances of the more radical Falangists became less substantial, and Madrid's policy

began to focus on playing for time, waiting to see how the conflict developed, skillfully maneuvering and negotiating behind the scenes with everyone and breaking with no one, neither the Axis,England, and the United States. Serrano Suner's meetings with Hitler and von Ribbentrop in mid-September had a decisive impact on the attitude towards Rome and especially Berlin, which was not immediately grasped in the two capitals, given that the Spanish continued not only to express their confidence in the victory of the, but also to talk about their intervention in the war as imminent, as soon as the necessary preparations were completed and at the most opportune moment for the course of the conflict itself, going so far as to agree to declare themselves ready to join the Tripartite Pact with a "strictly secret" protocol that would only be made public by mutual agreement. It was only on the occasion of themeeting between Hitler and Franco in Hendaye on October 23, and then a new visit to Germany by Serrano Suner on November 18, that the Germans and Italians truly realized how much the Spanish attitude had changed in the meantime. Hitler was now looking increasingly to the East and therefore wanted to secure his rear in the West, but at the same time, he was the object of efforts by some of his military collaborators, such as Admiral Raeder, who feared a conflict with the USSR and wanted to steer him towards the Mediterranean and West Africa, so he sought to establish an anti-British bloc that included both France and Spain and therefore wanted Spain to moderate its colonial claims and, at the same time, break the deadlock and enter the war in early 1941. Franco opposed a resiOn Serrano Suner's visits to Berlin in the second half of September and then to Rome in early October, cfr. adap, s. D, VI, pp. 72 ff., 81 ff., 172 ff.; ddi, s. IX, V, pp. 599, 639 ff. and 657; as well as R. Serrano Suner, Entre les Pyrénées et Gibraltar. Notes et réflexions sur la politique espugnale depuis 1936, Geneva 1947, pp. 146 ff. With regard to Mussolini, what he wrote to Hitler on October 19, 1940, is significant, cf. DDI, S. IX, V, pp. 721 ff. "The Italian, German, and Spanish governments agree on the following: passive resistance so firm that Hitler, meeting Mussolini in Florence a few days later, told him that, thinking back on the nine hours of talks he had had with the Caudillo, he had come to the conclusion that, rather than having to face another meeting with him, he would have preferred 'have three or four teeth pulled'. The talks with Serrano Suner the following month had no different outcome; despite German insistence, Serrano Suner, while professing his belief in German power and success, entrenched himself behind three arguments: Spain's internal difficulties, the inadequacy of German aid and, therefore, the need not to preclude other, indispensable sources of supply and, last but not least, the fact that Germany was sacrificing the claims of a long-standing friend for an extremely dubious rapprochement with its hereditary enemy. At this point, the game with Spain could only pass from German hands to those of the Italians, who were less heavy-handed and, all things considered, now less unpopular in Madrid. On November 20, Hitler turned to Mussolini for this purpose Mussolini: "Spain must now be induced to enter the war." Two days later, the "Duce" agreed and said he was willing to meet Franco personally. Despite Hitler's insistence, the preparations for the meeting dragged on, largely through no fault of Italy, so much so that the Führer, writing to Mussolini on December 31, observed, with a mixture of disappointment and irritation, that the attack on Greece had added fuel to the fire of Spanish disengagement: Spain, under the impression that the situation had changed for

Franco, rejected collaboration with the Axis powers. I fear that Franco is making the biggest mistake of his life here. I consider his idea of receiving grain and other raw materials from the democracies as a reward for his abstention to be extraordinarily naive. He will be kept in suspense by means of conversations until the last kilogram of grain in the country has been consumed, and then the democratic powers will begin their fight against him. I am sorry about this, because on our part, all preparations had already been made to cross the Spanish border on January 1 and attack Gibraltar at the beginning of February. The attack, in my opinion, would have led to success in a relatively short time. The troops assigned to it had been exceptionally selected and prepared. The weapons for this purpose had been specially chosen and prepared. Once the Strait of Gibraltar was in our hands, the danger of any about-face by northern and western French Africa would have been eliminated. I am therefore very sorry about Franco's decision, which does not correspond to the help that you, Duce, and I gave him at a time when he was in difficulty. I still have only a small hope that he will, perhaps at the last minute, realize the catastrophic effect of his behavior and that he will find, even if late, the road to that front whose victory will also decide his own destiny. The Mussolini-Franco meeting took place in Bordighera on February 12, 1941. Too late from all points of view. If in OctoberSpain's attitude had already changed profoundly as a result of the failure of the German invasion of England, now, after the Italian defeat in Greece and the victorious British counteroffensive in North Africa, it was unthinkable that Franco could be persuaded to take the field alongside the Axis. Moreover, on January 26, Serrano Suner had made no secret, when speaking with the Italian ambassador about the state of affairs. Reiterating his conviction that the Axis would ultimately prevail, he had explained in detail all the reasons why Spain could not intervene in the conflict at that time and had concluded: Spain will enter the war only when it is certain that the war will not be long. This is not out of fear, but because it does not have the means. And even for this short war, it must have the necessary preparation. But Spain will enter the war, rest assured. I cannot say how many months it will take. It will depend on circumstances, on our possibilities, on the help we will be given. When the country has enough grain and weapons, the Falangist government will be able to prepare public opinion for the conflict and Spain will finally be able to make its contribution to the common cause. Even if one wanted to believe him, Spanish intervention was so far off so far in the future that it lost all value in relation to the strategic situation that the Axis, and Italy in particular, had to face at that moment and that Rome and Berlin were thinking of overturning by closing the Strait of Gibraltar. Nor did Mussolini succeed in Bordighera in moving Franco from the positions behind which he had now entrenched himself. This was despite the fact that he outlined the general political and military situation and the particular Italian situation in obviously optimistic but also realistic and, here and there, self-critical terms, and reassured the Caudillo that Germany was now convinced of the impossibility of counting on France's sincere cooperation. On this last point, he launched into a veritable anti-French tirade, which was also anti-German by reflection, which, if it was to serve to convince the Spanish, flowed from his heart with the utmost sincerity and feeling: France is uncontrollable, it is entirely de Gaullist in spirit, it hopes only for England's victory, it is working to 'grignoter' (as the French say) the armistice and dreams that one day victory will be snatched by the

120,000 French soldiers who, in Morocco, under Weygand's command, are waiting armed for the right moment to act. For those who look back today on the events of those years, Bordighera appears, rather than a defeat for Mussolini and the Axis, to be confirmation of a change in Spain's position that had already taken place several months earlier, essentially since the previous September. Germany is generally considered to be primarily responsible, directly and indirectly, for this change. In reality, in our opinion, the greater responsibility lies with Italy. And not because it did not play an active part in the negotiations between Berlin and Madrid for months, but because of its total lack of initiative on the military front from June to September, the only period during the entire war in which Italy's military weight, however modest, was much greater, albeit gradually decreasing, than that of the British forces stationed in the Mediterranean, so that a different, decidedly active military attitude could have ensured it, as the British feared, successes of great importance, perhaps decisive at that particular moment, and certainly of great political importance. This was true both with regard to Germany, not only on a moral level, but also in terms of its most important strategic-political choices, namely the theater on which to focus its greatest effort after it had had to give up the landing in England; and with regard to the neutral coastal countries, particularly Spain, which was the most important of all strategically. For it is not rash to think that, faced with a different course of the war in the Mediterranean, Madrid would very probably have taken a less rigid stance and, willingly or unwillingly, would have ended up not making the prior acceptance of its colonial claims a conditio sine qua non, as, moreover, is suggested by the fact that it signed (but in a political and military context that allowed it, as we have seen, to continue to move freely and unscrupulously) the secret protocol of accession to the tripartite pact which, in Article 5, committed the Axis only "to ensure that Spain receives territories in Africa to the same extent that France may be compensated by assigning it other equivalent territories in Africa, without prejudice to the claims of Germany and Italy against France." But this brings us back to the point from which we started this digression on Spain-Axis relations in the eight months following the French collapse. That is, we return to the question of how to explain why Mussolini, despite believing that he needed his own military success to bring to the peace table (and in the months in question he feared more than once that he would not have time) and was determined to fight his "parallel war," did not take any real military initiative between June and October. He did not take any until he was certain that the landing in England would no longer take place, but he did not take any even after that, even though during those four months he talked about it a lot, both with his closest collaborators and with the Germans, and kept pressure on Badoglio and Graziani to go on the offensive in Egypt. According to reports, especially from Ciano, he seemed to show lively irritation at their procrastination and their delays. There is no doubt that in Mussolini's strategic vision, the North African front took precedence over all others. In fact, according to his Mediterranean view of the war, it was only from Egypt that it was possible to reach the heart of the British imperial system, the Suez Canal, and from there, on the one hand, connect with the anti-British Arab movements, primarily those in Palestine and Iraq, thus depriving England of Iraqi oil and, perhaps, even Iranian oil, and, on the other hand, re-establish contacts with East Africa. The offer to Hitler of troops (declined) and aircraft and submarines (accepted) for the attack

againstEngland was dictated solely by political considerations: to participate in the operations so that it could not be said, as had been the case with France, that Italy had not contributed directly to the most important and decisive action for victory. Other operations, against Yugoslavia and Greece, were considered by him during these months, driven by old and new grudges against these countries and with a view to getting his hands on the raw materials the Italian economy needed, but without actually doing anything about it. And, most likely, not so much because the Germans and Hitler personally had made it known that they were opposed to extending the conflict to the Balkans, fearing that it would provoke Soviet intervention and could "establish a solidarity of interests between Russia and England" and, in any case, cause an interruption of German supplies from that region, but because he himself, although seduced by the idea of achieving easy successes and pushed by Ciano, who was, in this regard, his true "black soul," was opposed at that moment because he did not want to disperse forces and suffer losses to obtain by force what he could have obtained by political means after the victory over England. In fact, on closer inspection, any operations against Yugoslavia or Greece were considered in Rome mainly as a result of German news and positions and fears of British military settlements in the Aegean or Ionian Seas. From the Historical Diary of the Supreme Command, it is clear beyond doubt that theorder given to Badoglio on July 3, 1940, to transfer the bulk of his forces from the western to the eastern border within a month was motivated by what Alfieri had communicated from Berlin two days earlier, namely that Hitler had informed him that an examination of French documents that had fallen into German hands showed that in the previous months both Yugoslavia and Greece had been hostile towards theAxis and had compromised themselves extensively with the French and British, even though "naturally, these countries are now trying to present themselves in a completely different light to the Axis powers." The same source also indicates that the opportunity to "be ready to attack Greece from Albania" was in turn conditioned three days later by "the event that the British occupy the Greek islands." Apart from these two alarms, the basic directives of this period ruled out action against Yugoslavia and Greece. In the general directives issued by Badoglio on June 25, immediately after the conclusion of the armistice with France, everything was focused on the shift "southward" of the theater of war, and no mention was made of the two Balkan countries. The same can be said of the strategic directives issued onJuly 11, in which it is explicitly stated: "for now, and not considering the Empire, which constitutes a theater of operations in itself, we have only one land border on which to act: Cyrenaica." These directives were modified a month later by Mussolini, who ordered that everything be "ready by September 20 to act on the eastern border." However, Badoglio's notes in his historical diary show that any action would have had to be carried out in agreement with the Germans and possibly with the Hungarians. In any case, it appears to have been set aside in Mussolini's new directives of August 22: "In relation to developments in the European and world political-military situation, the operational possibilities on the Yugoslav, Greek, and Egyptian chessboards have been examined in recent times Egyptian chessboards have been examined in recent times. With the imminent attack on British forces in Egypt, which will coincide with the German land attack on Great Britain, the Libyan sector becomes the main one on which attention and efforts must be focused; it is the sector on which we must

concentrate our forces on land, at sea, and in the air. The other two chessboards, the Greek and Yugoslavian ones, unless it is the Yugoslavians, Greeks, or British who take the, become areas of observation and surveillance, which is necessary given the ambiguous policy pursued by those two states and the mood of their peoples. It is therefore possible to slow down the pace set for the deployments on those two fronts, completing the one on the eastern front by October 20 instead of September 20 and the one on the Greek front by the end of September instead of the end of August. It is clear, moreover, that once Great Britain has been defeated, the states that have more or less openly sympathized with London will have no difficulty in following whatever decisions the Axis may take. For a complete assessment of these general guidelines and the relationship between them and the preparations made by Mussolini on the Yugoslav and Greek borders, it is necessary to bear in mind, in addition to the fears already mentioned, aroused by the documentation on the Yugoslav and Greek attitude transmitted to Rome by the Germans and, as far as Greece is concerned, by information gathered by the SIM about the possibility that the British might establish air and naval bases on Greek territory, at least two other facts, which must have contributed greatly to putting Mussolini on alert, even if they did not ultimately induce him to change his initial attitude, which was to come to a "showdown" with those two countries, but after the conclusion of the conflict with England, when they would have to accept what the Axis would impose on them. And this, at least officially, was the same line of behavior supported by the Germans and which Hitler reiterated several times in those months with Alfieri and Ciano, confirming to them that the Adriatic, like the rest of the Mediterranean, was part of the Italian sphere of influenceItalian sphere of influence and that the Yugoslav problem would be resolved, when the time came, "as Italy intended." With regard to Yugoslavia, it should be borne in mind that while the Germans repeatedly stated that it belonged to the Italian sphere of influence, there were signs of their growing interest in it and their suspicious dealings with the Ustasha, so that there wascertain that when the time came to resolve the issue, they would abide by the agreements. In this regard, Alfieri's observation (using diplomatic but at the same time very clear language) in his secret personal report to Ciano on August 27 is significant: Germany does not want, for the moment, complications in the Balkans, as they could be the source of a dangerous extension of the conflict. While, however, it does not renounce taking action that will allow it to hold good cards at the right moment (see activities in Yugoslavia and particularly in Croatia), it asks others, and especially us, to remain in a waiting position: Germany wants to resolve the Balkan problem in all its infinite ramifications, undoubtedly in agreement with Italy, but at a time when it is free to intervene without other concerns and thus bring all its forces to bear in order to give the region a possibly definitive structure, securing for itself the advantages to which it aspires and which are, of course, not insignificant. In light of these signs and maneuvers and the concerns they have raised in Rome, one might even wonder who Badoglio was referring to when, at the meeting held on September 15 with the chiefs of staff of the various arms to examine the political and military situation, discussing Yugoslavia, after defining an intervention against it as 'unlikely', he added: 'it would only be foreseeable in the event of an internal upheaval in Yugoslavia, a hypothesis that is not considered likely': he was referring to the possibility of hostile tendencies towards the Axis prevailing

in BelgradeAxis over those who wanted to pursue a policy of balance between it and England, or to the possibility of a Croatian crisis fomented by Berlin? The situation regarding Greece is more complex. There is no doubt that Mussolini wanted to "settle accounts" with it: he had been thinking about it since 1923, and recent events had only confirmed his desire. However, there is no real evidence that in those months he had decided to put it into action. On the contrary, his directives to Badoglio suggest that his intention was to achieve his goal or, as he told von Ribbentrop on September 19, later on, when Oraziani arrived to directly threaten Alexandria, it would be a matter of preventing the British fleet "from taking refuge in Greek ports" or, better still, after the end of the conflict. Badoglio's assessment of the political and military situation at the opening of the aforementioned meeting on September 15 is significant in this regard: Greece. By the end of the month, we will have completed the transport of the three divisions to Albania. We will then have eight divisions in Albania, plus undivided troops, including three cavalry regiments, equivalent to another division... These troops, as they have been concentrated in Albania, are, in the Duce's opinion, sufficient to keep Greece in check, which has no intention of attacking us because it is very afraid of both Bulgaria and us. Once these three divisions are in place, we consider the situation to be stabilized, as the Greek problem, like the Yugoslav problem, one of the problems that will be resolved at the peace table, whether the parties concerned like it or not. Ciano, on the other hand, wanted to proceed immediately against Greece. From the fierce anti-German stance he had taken a few months earlier, the son-in-law of the 'Duce', after the German victories in France, had become an admirer of the Germans and, in particular, an unconditional admirer of Hitler ("He is a man of genius. Indeed, a genius. From time to time, these enormous personalities appear on the flat, uniform, monotonous mass of Germanic intelligence, rising toward the sky like mountains: Bismarck, Goethe, and now Hitler"). and increasingly humiliated by the fact that his father-in-law showed no intention of loosening the reins and recognizing his "merits," he tended to establish a sort of continuous polemical comparison between the two leaders of the Axis, which inevitably ended to the Führer's advantage. But more importantly, the frustration caused by his relationship with his father-in-law increasingly tended to translateinto a growing desire to acquire new "merits" and further increase his power, so as to strengthen and revive his now precarious position as "heir apparent," and, at the same time, into a resurgence of his tendency to consider himself the most skilled, the most cunning, the most capable of 'outwitting' others. Hence his eagerness to expand his Albanian fiefdom with Camuria and to teach "lesson" to Greece and to do so, if not with Berlin's approval, at least without Berlin being able to prevent it. Ciano's diary offers little information on this subject. As Salvemini was the first to point out, the pages concerning the Greek affair (especially in October 1940) are among those on which, in 1943, after his departure from Palazzo Chigi, he returned to make deletions and rewrites in an attempt to hide and mitigate his personal responsibility. However, other sources give an idea of the part he played in the whole affair and the differences in position between him and Mussolini. Ciano was already thinking of an attack on Greece before Italy entered the war; without going too far back, suffice it to say that, during his visit to his Albanian "fiefdom" on May 22-25in Albania, not only did he refrain from curbing the ardor of local irredentists who claimed Ciamuria (as he did, on the

other hand, with regard to claims on Kosovo), but he even spoke with General C. Geloso, commander of the troops in Albania, about the possibility of occupying Greece, which was becoming "a dangerous Franco-English air and naval base," within two or three weeks, at the same time or almost at the same time as the intervention in the conflict'. For the time being, however, he had had to give up this idea, especially since in his speech on June 1, Mussolini had included Greece among the countries that Italy did not intend to 'drag into the conflict', but not to foment Ciamuria irredentism, which he considered a card to be played at the right moment to mount either a casus belli, or a political operation aimed at leading to one of those arbitrations to which the Axis resorted several times to justify its political interference in the Danube-Balkan region. And in fact, it was precisely a "trivial act of bloodshed," which took place more than a month and a half before the killing of Daut Hoggia on Greek territory, an "old fighter ofAlbanian irredentism in Ciamuria," and for the Greeks a ferocious bandit with a bounty on his head for twenty years, which he used as a pretext in August to try to persuade his father-in-law, already irritated by what the Germans had told him about Athens' attitude and concerned about the alarming news he was receiving from SIM and De Vecchi (then governor of theAegean), to accept the idea of forceful action against Greece. In fact, there seems to be no doubt that the Italian-Greek crisis in August was desired by Ciano and that it was he who tried to turn it into a conflict or at least into the imposition on Athens of an "agreement" that would sanction theannexation of Chameria and, perhaps, also of Corfu. There are too many elements pointing in this direction, even if none of them, based on the available documentation, allows us to clarify a particular aspect of the crisis itself, namely Ciano's choice of the moment to trigger it. As a first move, on August 3, Ciano asked the Greeks to immediately remove their consul in Trieste, who was "incurably anti-Italian."anti-Italian." Less than ten days later, first the Albanian press and then Italian radio and newspapers launched a violent anti-Greek campaign, focusing on the Hoggia case and Ciamuria irredentism, in which, not surprisingly, V. Gayda, one of the most important unofficial spokesmen for Palazzo Chigi, with three articles appearing on August 14, 17, and 22 in the Giornale d'Italia. At the same time, Ciano spoke with Mussolini "about the difficulties that had arisen on the Greek-Albanian border" and immediately afterwards, in August, he summoned Jacomoni and Visconti Frasca, the two highest-ranking political and military figures in Albania, both of whom were his protégés. Until now, we had three versions of the meeting held on August 12 at Palazzo Venezia between Mussolini, Ciano, Jacomoni, and Visconti Prasca, as well as some of its background details. Ciano's version: 'I accompany Jacomoni and Visconti Prasca to the Duce. The Duce sets the political and military guidelines for action against Greece. If Ciamuria and Corfu are ceded without a fight, we will ask for nothing more. If, on the other hand, resistance is put up, we will push the action to the end. Jacomoni and Visconti Prasca see the action as possible and even easy, provided that it is done quickly. The Duce, on the other hand, remains of, for reasons of general military order, to postpone the action until the end of September. Jacomoni's2 account largely echoes that of Visconti Prasca, but adds some elements of considerable interest, namely that, upon his arrival in Rome on the evening of the 11th together with Visconti Prasca, he was 'warned that Ciano wished, before my departure from Albaniabania, a report (which he intended to present to Mussolini) on the

sad event of the killing of Daut Hoxha'; that during the meeting the following day at Palazzo Venezia, contrary to what Ciano claimed, there was no mention of Corfu, but only of Camuria; that Ciano asked him to have Visconti Prasca urgently prepare a plan for a new border between Albania and Greece "reaching the mountains of Epirus," a request that seemed to him "to refer to his intention to negotiate along the lines of those then underway with Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria." Finally, as for Visconti Prasca's account, it should be noted that it is certainly the most detailed of the three, but that it moves Ciano's summons from the 1st to the 13th and the meeting at Palazzo Venezia to the 144th. Arriving in Rome on the evening of the 13th, Jacomoni and he were immediately received by Ciano and the undersecretary for Albanian Affairs, Z. Benini, and informed that "Mussolini, for political reasons not otherwise specified, intended to proceed with the occupation of Ciamuria." The following morning, Mussolini asked Jacomoni for "news on the internal situation in Albania, especially in the border areas, and on Albanian irredentist sentiments towards Comoni and Visconti Prasca, with whom he intends to confer. He speaks of a surprise attack on Greece towards the end of September. If he has decided to do so, I think it is advisable to speed things up. It is dangerous to give the Greeks the chance to prepare themselves." At least two things should be noted:) there is no source indicating that Mussolini drafted the Stefani note, which, moreover, was largely a reproduction of an article from the organ of the General Lieutenancy in Albania, the "Tomori"; b)) that until they met with Ciano, neither Jacomoni nor Visconti Prasca knew that they were to see Mussolini; c) that the last part of the note almost suggests that Ciano, having obtained his father-in-law's agreement in principle, was afraid that he might change his mind. g. Ciano, Diario cit., pp. 457 ff. See F. Jacomoni, La politica dell'Italia in Albania cit., pp. 229 ff. See DDI, s. IX, V, pp. 372 ff., dated 9 August 1940. See S. Visconti Prasca, Io ho aggredito la Grecia cit., p. 31 ff. Epirus' and asked him 'how many troops were stationed in Albania' and whether they were sufficient 'to carry out a sudden occupation of Epirus'. I replied that at that moment, in SIM's opinion, Epirus was weakly garrisoned by troops on a peacetime footing. Anaction of this kind, which was similar to a large-scale coup, had a good chance of success. Of course, we had to disregard the complications and reactions that such a move could provoke, both on the part of Greece and on the part of its possible allies, not excluding Yugoslavia. In any case, since the bulk of our troops in Albania were deployed in relation to Yugoslavia, while very few forces, it would have taken some time to reverse this situation. The troops had to be transported to the Greek border using roads that did not allow for rapid movement by motor vehicles. Motorized vehicles were in very short supply, so the troops had to travel on foot, covering distances of 300 to 500 kilometers. At the same time as the new deployment towards Greece was being implemented, it was necessary to put in place security measures towards the Yugoslav sector. The duration of this set of measures, which were difficult to conceal, could not exceed certain time limits, no more than 15 days, otherwise the Greeks would have implemented countermeasures and the 'surprise' would have failed. Once the 'surprise' had been thwarted, the occupation of Epirus would have had to take on the character of a show of force from the outset, requiring considerable resources and with completely different characteristics. In any case, even to carry out the coup, the troops in Albania would have had to be reinforced. Since the transport of new organic units to

Albania would probably have taken longer than the time available to the Greeks to rush to reinforce Epirus, instead of sending a few divisions to reinforce Albania in the first instance, it would have been appropriate to send a certain number of battalions to reinforce the existing ones... At the end of his presentation, the general reportedly told Mussolini that he did not appreciate the observation that his statements would have to be validated by the Ministry of War and the Army General Staff. And, once the meeting was over, he immediately rushed to inform Soddu, then Badoglio (who, struck by the news, told him he wanted to ask to confer with Mussolini as soon as possible) and finally Roatta. According to the Historical Diary of the Supreme Command, it should be assumed that Badoglio did not actually discuss Greece with Mussolini until August 20 ("I consulted with the Duce about possible operations against Yugoslavia and Greece. The Duce indicates that the former can no longer be considered necessary, while the latter cannot fail to be carried out") , i.e., only two days before the "Duce," as we have seen, decided that the Greek theater could also become one of "observation and surveillance" and that the pace of the influx of new forces (three divisions)1 in that direction as well. Badoglio makes no mention of the matter in his memoirs, and for good reason. Indeed, speaking of the attack on Greece at the end of October, he writes: "The question of Greece had never been raised until then." But his loyal Armellini, in a page of his diary to which we shall return, notes on August 15: "Be that as it may, one thing is certain: Badoglio knew nothing of aggressive intentions against Greece before yesterday morning's usual report from the Duce (11 a.m.)." To this set of versions and other elements somehow connected to them, we can now add what Roatta informed Graziani about the matter in one of his periodic memos, dated August 27, in which he kept him informed about the activities of the General Staff of the For the dispatch of the three divisions to Albania, see Sme Uff. Storico, Diario storico del Comando Supremo cit., I, I, pp. 376, 379, 388, and 409 (relating to the period 14-20 August). p. Badoglio, Italy in the Second World War, cit., pp. 50 ff. According to Badoglio, the Army General Staff was tasked with studying "how many forces would be needed in Albania to attack Greece" only in early October. Q. Armellini, Diario di guerra cit., p. 55. With regard to Badoglio's position, but also that of Mussolini and the timing of the Greek affair, see also U. Soddu, Memorie e riflessioni di un generale cit., ff. 17 ff.: "Our relations with Greece had then worsened in the summer of 1940, when it seemed that war was about to break out at any moment . Marshal Badoglio was opposed to the venture, as he believed that the Epiro question could be settled diplomatically at the time of peace. He therefore did not intend to increase Italian troops in Albania, because this would have led to a dispersion of forces. I agreed with the Marshal that war with Greece was inappropriate, but it was not up to us to provoke or avoid itavoid it. Instead, I was concerned about the possibility of suddenly finding ourselves engaged in a dangerous adventure without having the necessary forces in place. In fact, I considered the troops stationed in Albania to be insufficient, not only for offensive action but also for defensive action, especially in the event of a simultaneous attack by Yugoslavia and Greece. Although the assignment of troops and resources to the various operational theaters was not the responsibility of the Ministry of War but of the General Staff, I nevertheless went to Marshal Badoglio and expressed my opinion that it was appropriate to adequately reinforce our corps in Albania. The Marshal told me that this was not necessary, because we already

had troops ready in Italy and, above all, because that war was not to be fought and would not be fought: he would see to it that it was avoided. I did not share his opinion: the experience of the previous months had taught me how difficult it was to avoid war in Italy and how a war could break out even if it was not prepared for. Although, in the meantime, the danger of a conflict with Greece seemed to have been averted, I felt it was my duty to draw the attention of the Head of Government to the advisability of sending reinforcements to Albania, in case he foresaw complications in that area. Mussolini did not confide his plans to me (almost certainly, he had not yet decided anything); but he told me that he would take care of it. Some time later, noticing that nothing was being done, I returned to the subject with Mussolini, who assured me that he would issue strict orders; as far as I knew, however, nothing serious was done this time either. In early October, the Head of Government ordered me to discharge two classes, in response to pressure from the Minister of Finance, who was concerned about the huge expenses weighing on the state budget. I asked him what his intentions were for the immediate future, and he replied that he wanted to have a million men under arms by February 1941. I deduced from this, with satisfaction, that the war against Greece was overand perhaps avoided, and I issued the discharge orders, communicating the forecasts for February 1941 to the General Staff. The discharge caused a crisis, later rightly lamented by the General Staff, but a crisis that would not have affected the efficiency of the units in the following spring if, a few days later, at the meeting in Palazzo Venezia, Mussolini had not suddenly decided to go to war against Greece! 'The Army, of which the marshal, even though he was in charge of the troops in Libya, was still the head. In it1, dated August 13, we read: Soddu informs me that yesterday a war council took place at the Foreign Ministry with the participation of Visconti Prasca. It seems that the Foreign Ministry wants to go to war with Greece. Later, Visconti went to see the Duce. It seems that it has been decided to send two divisions to Albania, plus the well-known cavalry regiment ("Guide"). He will give orders Stamage. It is simply a matter of assuming a threatening stance towards Greece. In fact, General Visconti Prasca arrives, fresh from talks with Ciano and then with the Duce. He speaks of a reversal of the political situation (the day before, thethe killing of the Albanian Pioggia): no longer against Yugoslavia but against Greece. He should therefore have two divisions, plus a cavalry regiment. The action from Albania should initially be limited to a threat; in a second phase, it would involve the occupation of the part of Epirus claimed by Albania. I take note, of course, of what Visconti Prasca tells me, but I remain very perplexed about this procedure "outside" the SME. I am summoned by His Excellency Badoglio, who gives me the following instructions on behalf of the Duce: nothing has changed regarding Albania. For now, only the cavalry regiment should go. (I mention what His Excellency Visconti. His Excellency Badoglio replies: "There are many strategists who are concerned with possible future operations. I told the Duce that when the other matters are settled, more important matters have been settled, we will be able to obtain what we want from Greece without deploying a single soldier. Therefore, nothing has changed with regard to Albania." In the early afternoon, His Excellency Soddu telephoned me. His Excellency Badoglio has not yet been informed by the Duce about the Albania issue. The Duce's decisions (which will be communicated to Badoglio this evening) are for action, as communicated by Visconti Prasca. Andcc. Soddu reserves the right to give

me further explanations so that I can give orders before my departure for reconnaissance at the eastern border. Later, I have a clarifying conversation with Ecc. Soddu. Things are not exactly as Visconti Prasca reported. The Duce's idea is that Yugoslavia will remain calm under the threat of our (as well as German and Hungarian) effective deploymenton the border. In this situation, action can be taken against Greece. Therefore, action against Greece does not exclude potential or actual action against Yugoslavia. Orders will be issued in this regard. Soddu, regarding the "Visconti Prasca affair," , tells me that he will re-establish the chain of command by obtaining appropriate orders from the Duce for Badoglio. acs, r. oraziani, b. 58, phase. 47, subfile 9. For the days between August 12 and 22 (when Mussolini informed his son-in-law that he had given instructions for any action against Yugoslavia and Greece to be postponed "indefinitely"), Ciano's diary contains two notes of considerable interest. The first, under the date of the 15th, refers to the sinking of the Greek cruiser Helli near the port of Tomos by an unknown submarine (actually Italian, the Delfino):incident threatens to take on greater proportions. In my opinion, De Vecchi's intemperance is behind it. I consult with the Duce, who wishes to resolve this incident peacefully, as it could have been avoided. I propose sending a note to Greece: this will serve to bring the controversy onto diplomatic ground. The second, two days later, refers to a conversation between Alfieri and von Ribbentrop, during which the German Foreign Minister said that all efforts should be concentrated against England and that, therefore, it was best to shelve any plans to attack Yugoslavia and that "even possible action against Greece" was not at all welcome in Berlin. The note is worded as follows: The Duce dictated the reply: we naturally accept Berlin's point of view. This also applies to Greece: in fact, we are putting the note that was already ready back in the drawer. The content and, even more so, the tone of the two notes, especially the second one, reveal irritation and disappointment and, perhaps, a hint of polemical sarcasm towards Mussolini for his "submissiveness', which can only be fully understood in the light of other facts not recorded by Ciano in his diary and which the other main protagonists of the affair either remain silent about or refer to in vague and ambiguous terms. As we have seen, at the meeting at Palazzo Venezia on the morning of August 12, Mussolini had not taken any executive decision, despite the essentially positive assessments of Jacomoni and Visconti Frasca. Ciano, however, must have felt so sure of getting one out of him that, when he returned to him in the late afternoon with Visconti Frasca and, having failed to obtain anything more than "vague directives," a couple of hours later he personally gave Visconti Frasca "other more precise and almost executive directives," namely to be ready to act within fifteen days from that moment. These directives, reported by the commander of the troops in Albania to General Armellini before returning to headquarters, prompted a very significant comment from the latter: Did the Duce know about this step forward? Or was it a stroke of by Ciano, who is pursuing his own ideas of claims in favor ofAlbania, which is referred to here as the Grand Duchy of Tuscany? That this was indeed the case is proven by the fact that Ciano, in addition to instructing Jacomoni to foment and arm Ciamuriot irredentism on both sides of the border, worked to have more troops sent to Visconti Prasca by the Army General Staff without Badoglio's knowledge, who, of course, as soon as he learned of this, informed Mussolini, obtaining assurances that nothing would be done against Greece and that

'extraneous' interventions in military matters would be stopped, thus canceling the orders that Ciano had given to Visconti Prasca. In addition to the military level, Ciano also intended to take diplomatic action, probably thinking that if he succeeded in provoking a 'hardening' of Athens, it would be easier for him to persuade Mussolini to transfer the dispute to the battlefield. To this end, between August 15 and 16, he prepared the fight referred to in the two entries in his diary quoted above. It was entirely focused on the killing of Hoggia and the "disappointment" that Rome's "benevolent expectation" on the part of Greece had not been met after the union of Albania with Italy by "a new spirit of justice and fairness' in dealing with the long-standing problem of the Albanians in Greece, the note affirmed the need to resolve this problem as soon as possible and proposed a 'rapid, decisive, and complete' solution that would constitute 'the first step towards a complete and lasting definition of relations betweenItaly and Greece." That is, a solution "on the same basis as the solutions adopted or in the process of being adopted for similar situations in the Danube-Balkan region." In other words, a solution similar to those sanctioned by the "arbitrations" of Vienna and which, therefore, Athens would be very unlikely to accept. We have dwelled on this matter not only and not so much to validate our assertion that, despite his Hellenophobia, Mussolini never really adopted Ciano's position of attacking Greece at all costs, but because it is part of the explanation for the attack on Greece at the end of October. As we shall see in due course, the trigger that led Mussolini to attack in October was the fear that all his plans, on the basis of which he had been persuaded to enter the war, were about to collapse. Nevertheless, a not insignificant contribution to triggering the attack came from Ciano, who seized the opportunity to carry out his own plans, which, he had not given up even after August 22, when, for the time being, he had had to comply with his father-in-law's decision to shelvethe idea of a rapid attack on Greece. Having clarified this issue, in order to focus on the Mediterranean perspective of Mussolini's strategy and, therefore, the decisive importance that the "Duce" assigned to the Cyrenaican front over all other possible fronts, it is now necessary to examine in greater depth the Middle Eastern projection that this strategy assumed in Mussolini's vision. Like other aspects of Mussolini's policy, this too has not attractedattracted the attention of scholars, who, if they have mentioned it at all, have considered it, depending on the case, either mere boasting, partly to delude themselves and partlyto impress his interlocutors, or an extension of the Mediterranean discourse to try to make it more acceptable to the Germans and get them fully involved in the Mediterranean, or, on the contrary, an addition made by the Germans (to which he would have adapted and presented as his own), partly to give political and strategic breathing space to his Mediterranean vision of the war, which was too limited to North Africa, and partly in accordance with their autonomous line of conduct pursued through a shrewd and, in some cases, massive effort to penetrate the most radical pan-Arabist circles. In reality, the discourse on the Middle East policy of fascism and Mussolini in particular is more complex and deserves to be reconstructed at least in its general terms, because even if it did not translate into very few concrete military initiatives during the war years, the policy towards the Arabs and, more generally, towards the , constituted a chapter in the relations between Rome and Berlin that went beyond the strategic aspect of the war itself and that should be focused on in order to clarify their respective positions and, as far as

possible, their respective intentions for the future, namely for the post-war world order. German historiography and that of other countries have presented, somewhat by virtue of a general cliché, partly due to the scarcity of accessible documentation relating to Italy, presented National Socialist Middle East policy as virtually non-existent until around 1939, but more coherent than that of the Fascists: initially, Germany pursued only objectives of penetration and development of trade relations; subsequently (and in any case until the summer of 1941, given that after the Arab policy of theAxis would gradually lose its effective importance), it pursued mainly strategic objectives, without, however, making a serious effort to achieve them. In any case, it would have essentially adhered to the principle enunciated by the Wilhelmstrasse in a secret circular dated August 20, 1940 (which, in our opinion, is worthless in this respect and proves Berlin's concern to dispel the fears aroused in Rome by the first manifestations of its intentions to establish itself in the Mediterranean), according to which, while not renouncing its economic and cultural interests, Germany did not pursue political interests in the Mediterranean area, so that it would therefore leave Italy the precedence in the reorganization of the Arab area. In the Arab territories, which include the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, there will be no question of German political hegemony or of sharing hegemony with Italy.As it is impossible to go into too much detail here, it is appropriate to clarify some general points of reference first. Until Mussolini's decision to enter the war, Italy's Arab policywas directly dependent on the course of Italian-British relations, on Mussolini's attempts to reach the long-awaited "general agreement" with London and, therefore, on the need not to make overly rigid and compromising commitments to Arab nationalists. As we have already said, one thing must be made very clear: until May 1940, Italy's "sympathy' for the 'Muslims of the whole world' and Italy's dealings with the Arabs (as well as with the Indians) were nothing more than a general deterrent, an instrumental prospect cultivated in various forms to put pressure on London by creating difficulties for it, but to be sacrificed on the altar of the 'general agreement'. In short, it was a means of exerting pressure typical of Mussolini's psychology and modus operandi, and which, was in fact largely set aside for some time precisely when relations with England seemed to be moving in the desired direction. And despite the fact that, as we shall see, Mussolini was well aware of the objective importance that the Arab national awakening was assuming. That said, however, it is also necessary to clarify how this policy had developed over time. Until the end of the 1920s , Fascist Italy had not in fact had a real Arab policy, largely because its foreign policy was essentially based on that of Britain, and partly because of the difficulty, even if it had wanted to, to engage in political discussions with the Arabs while the reconquest of Libya was underway, because of Mussolini's prevailing interest in domestic politics, and, finally, because of the influence that nationalists and Catholic conservatives still had in Palazzo Chigi, so that the more strictly fascist push for a dynamic Arab policy ended up being discouraged and frustrated. It is not in our interest to exasperate the Arabs or encourage their growing xenophobic arrogance. We therefore have no reason either to favor or to combat their persistent anti-British reaction in the League of Nations, except insofar as one or the other may suit us in terms of our relations with England. These words, written by Francesco Coppola in a 1927 report upon his return from

a trip to the Levant, summarize the essence of this non-policy, which, moreover, has been clearly outlined by Carocci in its various aspects and, as far as we are concerned here, in its avoidance of any support for Arab nationalist movements and its preference, if anything, for regimes such as that of King Fuad in Egypt, which opposed them, making, at most, a few exceptions, and even these were more platonic than effective, for Syrian nationalist movements such as Misak, whose action was directed not against the British but against the French. A new phase, characterized by greater attention to the Arab world and a more autonomous and dynamic way of conceiving Italian policy towards it, had been emerging between 11930-32 and 1936. As far as its public, official manifestations were concerned, rather than certain anti-British peaks (especially during the war in Ethiopia), its leitmotif was the enunciation of the image of Italy as a 'bridge' between the West and the East and a 'Western school' for the nascent Islamic nations and, at the same time, the thesis that, in order to fulfill this function, it was necessary to develop Italy's cultural and economic presence in the Middle East (in 1930, the Fiera del Levante trade fair began to be held in Bari). Typical in this sense are the speeches by Suvich in the Chamber of Deputies on May 22, 1933, and by Mussolini at the regime's second five-year assembly on March 18, 1934. Within the framework of this policy of greater attention to the Arab world, various initiatives should be noted (partly initiated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and partly by the Undersecretariat for Press and Propaganda, then headed by Ciano), such as the two conferences of Asian students held in Rome under the formal patronage of the GUF in December 1933 and 1934, thestart of Arabic-language broadcasts by Radio Bari (May 1934), the creation, with headquarters in Cairo and correspondents in the main cities of the Middle East, of the Agence d'Egypte et d'Orient (June 1935), which Ciano had entrusted to the expert hands of the former editor of the Giornale d'Oriente, Ugo Dadone, and which, in addition to the normal tasks of a press agency , it also carried out underground activities to penetrate the Arab press through subsidies to newspapers and journalists, and the strengthening of the Istituto per l'Oriente (Institute for the East), which also combined more strictly cultural activities with other more political initiatives (in 1932, among other things, it hadthe controversial and, for the time being, overly ambitious initiative of the Italian-Arab fortnightly magazine 'L'avvenire arabo') \ and other cultural institutions, such as the Oriental Institute of Naples. It was at this stage that the first real systematic contacts began with some representatives (or their agents) of national and pan-Arab movements in the Middle East. Despite its greater dynamism, which in many cases was, however, more a consequence of the lack of precise choices and the tendency to 'put its hat' on a little everywhere, both for more or less personal activism and as a result of 'parallel' initiatives, both to test the ground and then be able to choose the path to follow, and despite the 'parallel' initiatives, or to test the ground and then choose the path to follow, and despite the increasingly frequent , at the end of the day, the Arab policy of fascism was much less defined and focused than it might have seemed, and above all than it appeared to the concerned eyes of London. It is no coincidence that it was during these years that the British developed a psychosis about 'the Italian under the bed' in relation to the Middle East, a psychosis that also infected the historiographythat studied these issues mainly on the basis of British documentation. With 1937, the year of the "sword of Islam," a third phase finally

began, which would continue until Italy's entry into the war. Domestically, the Arab question and the situation in the Middle East in particular, which until then had remained largely the preserve of specialized journalism, had become the subject of somethe regime's press, articles by Arab authors began to appear with some frequency, and other themes were added to those that had been recurring until then, such as the ideological links that allegedly existed between fascism and the Arab world and the greater correspondence of fascism with the religious, moral, and ideological values of the Arabs compared to communism. This development in actual propaganda activity was matched by a flourishingof historical, political, and cultural initiatives in which authoritative authors and institutions (from ISPI to the Center for Near Eastern Studies) of undoubted prestige participated. Contrary to what such activism on the domestic front might suggest, however, the use of the Arab card in foreign policy had been very modest. In years full of events so important for the Middle East, the only Italian initiative had been, in July 1939, a note in which Palazzo Chigi had expressed its "strongest reservations" regarding France's cession of the Sanjak of Alexandretta to Turkey. During the conversations and negotiations for the "gentlemen's's agreement" and then for the "Easter agreements," and even later, the problems of the Arab world, except to a certain extent that of the status quo in, were left to be raised by the British, and no effective proposals were put forward by the Italian side. This clearly shows that Mussolini and Ciano continued to consider the Arab card as a bargaining chip in the event that an opening arose for effective negotiations for a general Mediterranean agreement between Rome and London. So much so that, in the wake of the hopes raised by the conclusion the "Easter agreements," Rome immediately blocked aid to anti-British movements in the Middle East and moderated the tone of Radio Bari's broadcasts. Only after the decision to enter the war did Arab policy take on a permanent and not merely instrumental value in Mussolini's strategy, and it was essentially characterized and localized in relation to the Middle East. This was for a variety of reasons, some of which played in favor of this Middle Eastern characterization and localization, while others worked against its extension to the entire Arab Mediterranean world, including French North Africa. In favor of the former were: Mussolini's conviction that the Middle East, together with India, constituted the heart of the British imperial system and that the hardest blows should therefore be dealt there; the desire to deprive the British of the oil of that regiosia to Christ, Mohammed, or Buddha" against "vile materialism" (ACS, Min. Cultura Popolare, b. 163, phase. Apart from the most fiercely anti-Semitic magazines and newspapers, until Italy's entry into the war, while accentuating pro-Arab and anti-British sentiments, the regime's press generally avoided taking too drastic a stance on the conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine (see, for example, F. Bellotti, Arabi contro Ebrei in Terrasanta, Milan 1939). See, for example, with regard to ISPI, F. Cataluccio, Storia del nazionalismo arabo, Milan 1939; R. Sertou Salis, Italia Europa Arabia, Milan 1940; A. Giannini, L’ultima fase della questione orientale (1913-1939), Milan 1941 ; with regard to the Centro studi per il Vicino Oriente (Center for Near Eastern Studies), the collection of conferences and lectures published by the Accademia d’Italia, Aspetti e problemi attuali del mondo musulmano, Rome 1941; as well as M. M. Moreno, La dottrina dell’Islam, Bologna 1940; M. Guidi, Aspects and Problems of the Islamic World, INC, Rome 1937. and acquire

them as far as possible; the long-standing relations with Arab nationalist movements in the Middle East. The disadvantages of the second option were: the political expediency of not taking any action that might, in the first place, alarm Madrid, for which the prospect of a large colonial empire located in Arab territories was seen as a sine qua non for possible intervention; secondly, it would further affect the already difficult relations with Vichy; and thirdly, it would cause further friction with Berlin; as well as the fact (especially important for the period following the decline of hopes for Spanish intervention) that Italy's relations with the national movements in the Maghreb region were, with a few exceptions, extremely tenuous, if not characterized by strong hostility on the part of these movements towards Italian colonialism. This temporal and geographical context, and even more so the fact that for several years during an initial long period, Italy's relationsItaly with the Arabs, and in particular with the Palestinians, coexisted with those with the Jews and even with the revisionist Zionists, but within certain limits also with Weizmann's Zionist movement, may lead one to think that the entire Arab policy of fascism wasinstrumental and opportunistic. That, as always in politics, a certain amount of this was still present even after the adoption of the race policy and, above all, the intervention in the war had given Italian Arab policy a new character, is a fact that, especially considering Mussolini's mentality and modus agendi, cannot be ruled out. This is all the more true given that fascism included various positions that, for better or worse, reflected different and often conflicting cultures, traditions, interests, and bureaucratic particularities that sought to influence (and often succeeded in doing so) Mussolini's politics and which, for what directly concerns us here, found in Ciano's "cunning' and unscrupulousness of Ciano and in his personal power politics. That said, the fact remains that with the entry into the war, the Arab policy of fascism took on a character and fundamental meaning different from those it had had in previous years, both in terms of the advantages that Mussolini thought he could derive from it on the military front and in terms of the future post-war order in the Mediterranean area. That this order should provide for the independence and unity of the Middle East was, for Mussolini, theoretically a foregone conclusion. Thanks to his sensitivity as an old revolutionary and his political instinct, he had already sensed the potential of the Arab and Indian national awakening in the years immediately after the First World War, and in the years that followed he became even more convinced of this: the Arab national movements and pan-Arabism were a reality that could not be ignored and would have to be reckoned with in the event of a real crisis between the great powers; to oppose them would have been a mistake for Italy, even for an Italy that had emerged victorious from the war. It would have meant creating an enemy that Italy could not afford to fight, which would have precluded or at least jeopardized its economic, cultural, and ideological penetration of the Middle East, it would have caused difficulties sooner or later in Libya and probably also with other Muslim populations of the empire, and made control of the 'gateway' of Suez; and, finally, it would have meant laying the foundations for the establishment of an area of political, economic, and ideological penetration for other great powers, Germany and the USSR, eager to establish themselves in the Mediterranean and get their hands on Middle Eastern oil. Hence his abandonment of the idea, which was in truth more nationalist and Catholic-nationalist than fascist in origin, pursued until thethe final stage of negotiations with England, to obtain the transfer to Italy

of some of the Anglo-French mandates in the Middle East and also of whatever projects periodically surfaced in the Foreign Ministry and especially in Italian Africa and in various circles, especially economic ones, of the regime to include among the objectives of the Italian war a direct settlement in that region and instead to espouse that of its future settlement on pan-Arabic bases, even if Berlin , referring to the classic policy of divide and rule, was thinking more of a multiplicity of Arab states. In this way, according to Mussolini, Italy would have secured that 'influence' (which, in words, the Germans said they recognized and which, in any case, should have been formally confirmed at the peace table) over Egypt, Sudan (in condominium with Egypt to ensure territorial continuity between Libya and the Aoi), Palestine, Transjordan, Syria (and Lebanon), Iraq, and (to control the southern entrance to the Red Sea and make the "gateway" of Suez truly open and secure) on the western and southern coasts of the Arabian Peninsula, including Aden, which, as we have seen, he was already discussing with Alberto Pirelli in July 1940. There were undoubtedly weak points in this prospective plan, and it is difficult to say how much Mussolini was aware of them and, if so, how he thought he could overcome them: the elasticity, not to say ambiguity, of the term "influence" (which in the case of the islands at the southern entrance to the Red Sea inevitably ended up taking on the meaning of direct possession), the condominium over Sudan (which, imagined as an Italian-Egyptian transformation of the Anglo-Egyptian one, gave the "influence" over the ") and, above all, the fact that fascist pro-Arabism was limited to the Middle East and did not apply to the Maghreb, let alone Libya. This gave rise to sarcasm, suspicion, and accusations that, and this brings us to another of the general points of reference we are discussing, were not lacking on the Arab side, nor on the Anglo-American side, and, underlying, even on the German side, and which led various scholars to consider Mussolini's entire Arab policy to be merely instrumental and opportunistic, leading them to conclude that the Arab national movements, on which the 'Duce' based so much of his political and military strategy, were in fact wary of him and, rather thanItaly, they looked instead to Germany. In our opinion, this conclusion is too drastic, even if it is based on elements that certainly cannot be underestimated. A first point to consider is what we would call "Arab realism" or, if you prefer, the awareness that the leaders of the Middle Eastern national movements had of their own strengths, of the need to secure aid, of who could provide it, and of the relative price to pay. From this point of view, especially after the disappointing experiences of the 1920s with the USSR, the best ally could only be Italy, with which, moreover, a series of relations already existed. This was despite the problem of Libya, Italian claims on Tunisia, and, subsequently, Rome's attitude towards Algeria and Morocco. In the heated climate of the early post-war period, at the time of the so-called Tripolitan Republic, and even more so in the years of the Italian reconquest and in view of the methods used by Badoglio and Oraziani to achieve it, Libya had provoked a widespread outcry against Italy throughout the Arab world. By 1933, however, this mood had calmed considerably and Fascist Italy had begun to be viewed with different eyes, attentive not so much to its presence in Libya (where, moreover, the only alternative, entirely theoretical, to Italian colonialism was the Senussi movement, which nationalist and pan-Arabist movements viewed with very little sympathy) but rather to its revisionist policy, its disputes with France, and its

Mediterranean aspirations. Advances toward Italy had begun (which Rome was careful, as we shall see, to drop) even from men such as the Syrian Shekib Arslan, who was not only one of the most prominent figures of Arab nationalism, but who in previous years had led a violent campaign against Italian colonial policy in Libya. Even before the end of 1934, the organ of the Syrian-Palestinian delegation to the League of Nations, La nation arabe, published an article by Arslan himself (who had been received by Mussolini on February 13 and 15 and had then visited Massawa and Asmara) in which Italian policy towards the Muslims of Eritrea was praised and contrasted with the oppressive policy of the French in Algeria. The war in Ethiopia had momentarily overshadowed this new climate; some sectors of the Arab world had in fact spoken out againstItalian colonial imperialism and in defense of Ethiopian independence: however, this was nothing comparable to what had happened a few years earlier during the repression in Libya. In any case, the more political Arab nationalist leaders distanced themselves from Italy's most vocal accusers. Arslan's case was typical: the Arabs could not approve of the Italian conquest, but they had to remain neutral because Ethiopia treated Muslims worse than Italy, because England oppressed the Arabs and took advantage of the conflict to perpetuate its occupation ofEgypt, Palestine, Transjordan, and southern Yemen; and because the British were exploiting the situation "to demonstrate that the Arab nation follows only and always England and that, therefore, the accusations made by the Arabs against the British for giving Palestine to the Jews no longer have any effect"; and finally, because Mussolini had "important Muslim interests" in his hands. Thus, once the Ethiopian affair was over, the process of rapprochement with Rome resumed with renewed vigor and, at least as far as the most radical Arab leaders were concerned (who, it should not be underestimated, were all from the Middle East), the Libyan problem had been, once the war broke out, definitively shelved. Certainly, instead of Italy, the Arab nationalist movements could have looked to Germany, which, in addition to not presenting itself as a colonialist country and oppressor of Arab populations, had the undoubted "merit" of pursuing a clear, uncompromising anti-Jewish policy, the opposite of that practiced at least until 1938 by Rome, which condemned anti-Semitism and was even pro-Zionist on the Palestinian question. And, In fact, in addition to Rome, they also looked to Berlin for realism, though not as an alternative to Rome. Apart from the suspicion or lack of sympathy that some of them harbored for Nazi racism and, more importantly, even though they only had proof of it in 1937, they had to convince themselves that Hitler, despite his anti-Semitism and hostility to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, did not intended to jeopardize his relations with England by taking an explicit stand against the division of Palestine, Arab leaders had to realize that they could only play the German card together with the Italian one: if Italy had not completely broken withEngland or, worse, had come to an agreement with it, German support alone, even if it had been available, would have been of little or no use. If Italy and Germany had marched together against England, relying solely on Berlin would have been absurd. Nor, as usual, other factors cannot be underestimated, such as the fact that for several years Berlin had no clear ideas on Arab and Eastern policy in general and that various positions on the matter coexisted, and that the best channel for reaching Berlin in the early years was often Rome. Begun at Mussolini's explicit request in early 1933, secret contacts with Arab nationalist leaders (in particular Arslan, el-Giabri, the

secretary general of the Pan-Islamic National Congress Tabatabai, and, most importantly, the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hai Amin el-Husayni) were maintained mainly by Italian diplomats in the Middle East and, initially, in Geneva and by two figures who for a long time acted as a link between Palazzo Chigi and the anti-British Arab and, as will be seen later, Indian movements: a psychiatrist and former Italian medical officer of Romanian origin, Professor Carlo Arturo Enderle (known in Muslim circles as Ali bin Làfar), and an Indian nationalist of Muslim religion linked to him, Iqbal Shedai. In the early years, relations did not go beyond the provision of economic aid by Italy (Arslan and el-Giabri had received half a million lire by early September 1934). On the Arab side, the aim was to achieve, in the more or less near future, in addition to diplomatic action ("Italy should, within the limits of its possibilities and current international commitments, promote the trend towards Arab independence in international conferences, relations between states, etc.") and political action (within the various Arab countries and by the Pan-Arab Agitation Committee), they also aimed to carry out "direct action" "with large-scale violent movements" in the near future. For this action, Italy was asked to provide "significant resources," including weapons, but Suvich was very cautious in this regard and pointed out to Arslan and el-Giabri, who had proposed the plan to him, but also indirectly to Mussolini, that "that in the conditions of the mandated countries, terrorism can be a dangerous weapon because it can give the mandating powers a good pretext to declare that these countries are not ready for political freedom." What had prompted Mussolini to commit himself more deeply were the war in Ethiopia and the resulting crisis in relations with London. In January 1936, the "Duce," while considering the cause of the Arabs in Palestine compromised, had been unable to resist the Mufti's request for money and weapons he could not resist the idea of creating difficulties for the British and decided to give £25,000 (although only £12,000 had been paid by July) and weapons (which were to be supplied through and at the request of Ibn Saud, who would then forward them to Palestine), all while avoiding "providing Judaism with elements that it could use to justify its anti-Italian attitude in the current situation."anti-Italian stance in the current situation." The victorious conclusion of the war in Ethiopia had raised the Arabs' hopes for Italy's help against England and the Jews. While some of their more moderate representatives, who above all did not want to jeopardize their relations with London, such as Ibn Saud (who, in order not to arouse suspicion among the British, had not requested the weapons granted to the Mufti), had maintained a cautious and wait-and-see attitude and had tried to get as clear an idea as possible of Italy's real intentions before taking any overly committed initiatives, others, and above all the Mufti, had staked everything on Italy (in early July 1936, to the Consul General in Jerusalem, De Angelis, who was about to to travel to Rome to plead his cause, the Mufti said: "Tell Mr. Mussolini that I have taken the field because I believe in his promises and his support") to spark the revolt and defeat the Peel plan for the partition of Palestine, finding in Ciano, newly appointed foreign minister, a more willing and authoritative interlocutor than Suvich had been. Thus, between July-September 1936 and the end of 1937, Italy's commitment to in favor of Arab nationalists in the Middle East had made considerable progress, even though Palazzo Chigi (and the SIM) had continued to take every precaution not only to keep it as hidden as possible, but also to drop the more extremist projects in which the Mufti wanted to involve them*. .

. \ . . Considering the results obtained during the Ethiopian conflict to be entirely positive, Palazzo Chigi, as clearly shown in a report drafted for Ciano and "fully" approved by him on July 20, 1936, became convinced of the "need not to halt our action towards the Arab Muslims in any way" and, indeed, to give it "ever greater development," albeit with the utmost caution and discretion. On this basis, in the second half of 1936 and in the early months of 1937, following a series of contacts in Rome and Geneva with representatives of the Mufti, who had insisted on new and more substantial aid in cash and arms, Palazzo Chigi decided to send a first shipment of arms and ammunition (which in reality did not take place, first because of the risks involved in transport via Syria, then because of the negotiations between London and Rome, which led the latter to block the shipment) and the allocation of new financial aid, which was, however, much lower than requested, given the financial situation and Italy's reduced availability of hard currency. Italian 'parsimony" and the fact that the possibility of an Italian-English rapprochement had emerged, the Arabic-language broadcasts of Radio Bari had taken on a more moderate tone, disappointing and worrying the Mufti, but not leading him to resign himself to considering the Italian card no longer usable. Between July and September 1937, his trustees, including his cousin Sayed Giamal el Husayni, renewed their requests for further aid for the Arab cause in Palestine, while reconfirming their trust in Italy. At the same time, however, some of them had made contact with the Germans, who had said they were willing to supply them with weapons via Iraq. As a result, at the end of September, Rome deemed it appropriate to accept at least some of the economic requests, so as not to risk losing its position as a privileged interlocutor. Four months later, given the positive progress of negotiations withEngland, el Alami was informed that Italy had decided to suspend 'all subsidies'. Given 'the coincidence of Palestinian interests with the general directives of Italian policy', the Mufti could count on Italy's 'moral and indirect aid, which is much more advantageous than material aid'. England, the representative of Palazzo Chigi added 'on a personal basis', now seemed convinced of the failure of its pro-Zionist policy, so that, even if for the moment it could not make 'excessive concessions', "the situation of the Arabs would be greatly benefited by this fact in the future," so they would do well to try to reach "some agreement with the British government, even if it only partially satisfied the national aspirations of Palestine." As one can easily imagine, the blow to all Arabs, extremists and moderates alike, was very hard, and even harder was the one that came shortly thereafter, as a result of the conclusion of the "Easter Accords." As a good politician, however, the Mufti tried not to show it too much. At the end of March, el Alami reconfirmed the "undying gratitude' of his leader and the Arab nationalists of Palestine for all that Italy had done for them and said he understood that Italy's future attitude would have to be in harmony with the new Italian-British relations. 'The Mufti only hopes thatItaly would not agree to anything that could compromise its magnificent position in the Arab world and would not suddenly abandon Palestine." And on this bittersweet note, he had made new requests for money to continue the struggle; requests that Rome, in order not to completely burn its bridges, had decided to satisfy at least in part and "for the last time." On the Arab side, however, they did not give up. In particular, faced with the new attitude of the British government, determined both to put an end to the Arab revolt and to establish a new relationship with the moderate Palestinians in

order to isolate the more extremist ones, the Mufti and, more generally, the more radical Arab movements could certainly not give up using every card in their possession, especially the Germans (towards whom, moreover, there was an old sympathy in the Arab camp dating back to the First World War, when Germany and the Ottoman Empire were allies) and, despite their recent behavior, the Italians. And this, let's be clear, was not, as various authors have claimed, because of a supposed affinity between their ideology and that of the Nazis and Fascists, which did not exist, but because of the entirely poetic logic that sees in enemies (actual or potential) as friends, especially if they have already proven, as was the case with Germany and even more so with Italy, that they are interested, in the same political logic, in supporting their cause. In this objective and subjective situation, el Alami had repeatedly returned to the fray; first, in October, in a direct manner ("the Mufti... now implores the Duce to grant him further aid in order to achieve the goals he has set himself and which he is sure he will achieve'), then, in December and again in the following March, indirectly: if he were provided with the necessary means, the Mufti could "cause serious trouble for the French in Syria." However, the Italians remained unyielding this time, and for over a year there was virtually no contact between Rome and the Mufti and, more generally, the Arab nationalist movements. Not even the outbreak of World War II in September 1939 prompted Ciano to change his line of conduct. All this despite the fact that, on the one hand, from May-June 1939, the British had launched anintense anti-Italian propaganda campaign throughout the Middle East and increasing pressure had been exerted on Egypt and Iraq to adopt a hostile attitude towards Italy; on the other hand, the German-Soviet agreement of August 1939 had aroused widespread fears in Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq of a resumption of traditional Russian expansionism towards the Persian Gulf and had also led suggested a parallelism of German-Soviet interests in the region, with the consequence that Germany lost much of the sympathy and positions it had managed to gain there, thanks in part to the space left vacant by Italy; and, on yet another hand, some news reaching Palazzo Chigi since November 1939 suggested that a vast movement of opposition to England and France was being organized by Palestinian, Syrian, and Iraqi nationalists, and that in January 1940, the Mufti, who after the outbreak of war had left Beirut (where he had resided since October 1937) to prevent his surrender to the British by the French and had taken refuge in Baghdad, had sent a memorandum to the Italian representative in the Iraqi capital, Luigi Gabrielli, in which he explained the reasons why his movement had adopted an attitude of "temporary neutrality" after the start of the conflict in Europe, which had all the flavor of an advance in view of a resumption of relations, and finally, the fall in Iraq in April of the government of Nuri el Said, considered by nationalists to be too submissive toEngland, and the establishment of that of Rashid Ali el Gaylani, whose anti-British sentiments were well known in Rome. As already mentioned, it was only the decision to enter the war alongside Germany that prompted Mussolini and Ciano to change their course of action. It was only after June 1, 1940, that Mussolini's Arab policy changed character, losing the instrumental nature that had distinguished it until then and took center stage in the political-military strategy of the "Duce," both in the present and even more so in the future, that is, after the war. During the first few months, with a certain slowness and caution, which were due to various obstacles and concerns, only the

precipitating of the situation in Iraq and the military victories of the Axis in Greece and North Africa in the spring of 1941 would completely overcome, and above all the fact that, at first, the immediate military impact attributed to it was considered to be very limited. Much more important was considered to be the political impact, the fruits of which, however, would essentially only be reaped after the end of the war. Hence, for the time being, it was possible to proceed without haste and even with a certain caution in order to avoid missteps. Significant in this regard is the following assessment found in a note to Ciano written at theearly January 1941 as a summary of the policy towards the Arabs in the first seven months of the war by the Directorate of European and Mediterranean Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: The action currently underway and that which will be possible to carry out with the requested resources certainly cannot lead to decisive results with regard to the political and military situation in the Levant countries. However, they appear indispensable in order to encourage and support, on the one hand, the Arab movement against England, and on the other hand, to prepare the special situation we aspire to in the Levant, in accordance with and in protection of our fundamental interests. As for the obstacles, the most important ones must have been, on the one hand, the resistance to a radical change of policy coming from within Palazzo Chigi and the Ministry of Italian Africa, the former opposed above all to making explicit commitments regarding the future independence of all Arab countries, the latter reluctant to accept theidea of giving up part of what it considered to be future spoils, and, on the other hand, by the scarcity of accurate information and contacts resulting partly from the state of war and even more from the stagnation that fascist Arab policy had experienced in the previous two years. The only real point of reference was the representation in Baghdad (the one in Tehran was less important from this point of view and the one in Kabul was mainly concerned mainly with Indian politics), run by a very active diplomat, Gabrielli, but who could only communicate with Rome via Tehran (hence repeated delays and misunderstandings) and who was viewed by some at Palazzo Chigi with a certain suspicion and condescension due to his fervent pro-Arabism and considered too enthusiastic a supporter of el Gaylani's cause and demands. As for concerns, the most important was certainly (especially in the winter of 1940-41, when defeats in Greece and North Africa put Italy at a distinct disadvantage compared to Germany) the German attitude (during this period, German Arab policy was largely inspired by von Papen, then ambassador in Ankara, and by Grobba, who returned to Berlin in 1939 following the breakdown of diplomatic relations between Iraq and Germany), who was firmly opposed to going, on the issue ofindependence, which was what most interested the Arabs, beyond the reaffirmation of German and Italian "sympathy" for the struggle of the Arab peoples and the generic assurance that they could count on this sympathy, and on that of pan-Arabism, beyond an equally generic assent to a possible federal union, which Berlin was induced to propose to appease them (and which the Arabs considered insufficient) and because, all things considered, it could also have presented opportunities for those interested in its disintegration. This attitude was was ultimately based, as Rome realized, on an anti-Italian prejudice that contradicted the statements and commitments with which Berlin continued to assure that the Mediterranean region, and within it the Arab region, was reserved for Italian hegemony, so thatItaly had precedence in

the formulation of the relevant decisions. In this context, it is quite natural that Italian Arab policy initially showed more attention to Egypt, where, according to SIM, hostility towards England seemed very alive, and to Iraq, which had not broken diplomatic relations with Italy, as Fanno had done with Germany under English pressure. and which, For further details on the differences between the Italian and German positions, see C. R. De Felice, Il fascismo e l'Oriente, op. cit., pp. 43 ff. According to the SIM, the situation in Egypt and Syria was "decidedly hostile to the British," see Sme Uff. Storico, Diario storico del Comando Supremo, op. cit., I, I, p. 177. On August 28, 1940, Badoglio's right-hand man, General Q. Armellini, Diario di guerra cit., p. 66, noted: "Egypt is more with us than with them, at least the King and his party, who say they are even prepared for a revolt. But will they be able to? Will it suit them?" Confirmation of Rome's hopes for a possible internal reversal of the situation in Egypt in Italy's favor is offered, among other things, by the words with which Radio Bari opened its Arabic-language news broadcast on July 17, 1940: "Egyptians! The British government is pushing your country to ruin. Mussolini has solemnly declared that Fascist Italy does not intend to drag other peoples into the conflict, including Egypt. Know, O Egyptians, that Italy is fighting only against the British forces that are illegally occupying Egyptian territory and using it as a base for attacks against Libya. Italy intends to respect Egypt's independence and sovereignty, its institutions, and its freedom. Italy shares your desire to free Egypt from British occupation, as well as from any other foreign occupation. The Axis powers want to drive the British out ofEgypt in collaboration with the Egyptians themselves, thus ensuring Egypt's complete independence. If circumstances force Italy, attacked by British troops occupying Egypt, to carry out acts of war against Egyptian territory, it makes a formal and absolute commitment that Italian troops will not remain in Egypt any longer than is strictly necessary. Egyptians! Remember what happened in Spain, where Italian troops fought for National Spain; and from where, having achieved their goal, they withdrew without asking for anything that could in any way harm the independence and integrity of that country. Egyptians! Your country has been martyred by the British. The nefarious Anglo-Egyptian treaty not only failed to free you from British occupation, but was disastrous for you. Five years ago, Egypt was one of the few countries in the world with a positive balance of payments and substantial accumulated reserves. With the Anglo-Egyptian treaty, the British caused the depletion of all Egyptian reserves and indebted your country to Great Britain for purchases of arms and war materials, not in the interests of Egypt, but of selfish, imperialist England. Today, the Egyptian fellah is starving to pay for the weapons of the British oppressor, who, rightly fearing your reaction, is trying to disarm the Egyptian army to make the final national uprising ofagainst the ruler" (asmae, Political Affairs, Italy, b. 73, "1940 Propaganda Radio Bari"). See ddi, s. IX, V, p. 72 (June 22). Therefore, it was possible to hope to use it as a fixed point to block any German maneuvers to penetrate the east, rather than a resumption of old relations with the Mufti. And in fact, the first contacts were not made with the latter (about whose positions and activities Ciano asked Gabrielli to update him only on August 3, when a first contact had already taken place in Turkey between von Papen and Osman Kemal Haddad, the Mufti's private secretary), but with el Gaylani, especially since the Iraqi prime minister was the first prominent Arab representative to approach Rome to express his interest in the "future fate of Syria," namely

its full independence. In fact, it was precisely as a result of el Gaylani's request that Mussolini's new political course began to take shape. Ciano immediately replied that Italy aimed "to ensure the complete independence and territorial integrity of Syria and Lebanon, as well as Iraq itself and the countries under British mandate," and opposed any British or Turkish claim to territorial occupation "in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq." Once the first step had been taken, others followed, so to speak, of course, although they were accelerated to some extent by Gabrielli's zeal and the difficulties he faced. Pressed by el Gaylani's requests for an official Italian-German communiqué publicly confirming the assurances Ciano had given him verbally, which Rome did not want to formalize knowing that the Germans did not agree, Gabrielli ended up, on July 7, to put them in writing in a "private" letter to the prime minister, which deeply irritated the Germans when they found out, but did not satisfy el Gaylani. The latter insisted on his request for an even broader official statement concerning all Arab countries, considering the statements transmitted to his post by Radio Bari and, inevitably, by Radio Berlin to be too vague and generic, and tried to support his request by resortingresorting, on the one hand, to a sort of political blackmail: he claimed that he needed the declaration in order to put Nuri el Said (who was foreign minister in his government) with his back to the wall and thus be able to proceed with the reestablishment of diplomatic relations with Germany; and, on the other hand, to the good offices of the Mufti, with whom he worked closely and who, in Berlin, was considered a more important point of reference than himself, being better informed about the situation in the Middle East. Rome (which was better informed about the situation in the Middle East), was considered a more important point of reference than he was. So, ultimately, despite this first phase of the affair of the declaration in favor ofindependence of the Arab countries dragged on without conclusion until the fall of the el Gaylani government at the end of January 1941, for those who study Mussolini's Arab policy, it constitutes an indispensable precedent for understanding not only its subsequent developments and the differences between the Italian and German positions, but also serves to better understand the perspective in which the resumption of relations between Italy and the Mufti took place. Because, while there is no doubt that this would have happened anyway, it is equally clear that the following factors contributed significantly to hastening it: a) the fact that el Gaylani resorted to the good offices of the Mufti, b) Rome's fear that the Germans, with whom the Mufti had first made contact, would establish a sort of privileged relationship with him and, through him, with el Gaylani. This explains why, throughout 1940 and until the Mufti arrived in Italy in October 1941 (rescued by the Italians, who managed to get him out of Tehran under a false name, where he had taken refuge in May at the time of el Gaylani's final defeat and the British occupation of Iraq), relations with him did not take on the central role in Italian Arab policy that one might have expected, given the precedents of the pre-war years. During this period, in fact, the Mufti was taken into consideration and helped financially, not so much because of what he said he could do against the British in Palestine and Syria, but because he was able to influence el Gaylani and speak on his behalf1. This view proved to be correct, since, in fact, the Mufti's real chances of launching an armed struggle in Palestine and other Arab countries capable of causing difficulties for the British and thus supporting el Gaylani's regime proved non-existent, both during the political crisis of the winter of 1940-41, which

led to the forced resignation of the El Gaylani government, and in the following April-May, when El Gaylani returned to power and the crisis turned into open armed conflict with the British. The same can be said for the subsequent occupation of Syria by Anglo-Gaullist forces. This was despite the fact that the psychological and military situation, which had been favorable to the British in thewinter due to the repercussions of Italian defeats in Greece and North Africa, in the following spring it underwent a real reversal as a result of the Axis victories in Yugoslavia and Greece, the occupation of Crete, and the Italian-German counteroffensive in Cyrenaica, all events which, in theory, should have played in favor of a resumption of armed struggle by Arab nationalists in Palestine and Syria. Although in the long run this too proved to have no concrete positive outcomes and ultimately ended in complete failure, better results were achieved by the policy towards Iraqi nationalists and the al-Gaylani government, if only because of the difficulties it created for the British for about a year, forcing them to divert forces that could have been very useful to them in North Africa and on other fronts. According to the available documentation, during the first phase of the Iraqi crisis, when the British, taking advantage of Italy's military defeats and their repercussions on Italian prestige in the Middle East, exertedsupport of the United States, Turkey, and Egypt, to induce it to end its anti-British attitude and to force el Gaylani to relinquish power, Italy played a role in various aspects, including close relations with Arab leaders outside the nationalist groups closest to the Mufti. See, for example, ibid., VI, pp. 600 and 716 ff., as well as, for the alarms raised by German activities, pp. 395, 413 ff. and 588, and, confirming their validity, Le procès du général Dentz (18 au 20 avril 1945), in Les grands procès de la guerre 1939-1945, Lyon 1945, pp. 196 ff. For first-hand accounts, as Palestinian revolutionary leader, with the Mufti, see ddi, s. IX, V, pp. 405 ff., 566 ff., 578 ff., 633 ff., 642,664 ff., 761; VI, pp. 12 ff., 74 ff., 139, 213 ff., 285 ff., 456 ff., 500, 502 ff., 561 ff., 581 and 695 ff. A report by the Director General of European and Mediterranean Affairs, G. Buti, to Ciano dated October 31, 1940, on his meeting with one of the Mufti's closest collaborators, who had been sent by the Mufti to Germany and Italy for the purpose of developing and finalizing the pourparlers held directly and indirectly in Baghdad and Ankara with Gabrielli and von Papen, provides many elements for focusing on the Mufti's position during this period: see R. de Felice, Il fascismo e l'Oriente cit., pp. 270 ff. See J. A. Thorpe, The United States and the 1940-1941 Anglo-Iraqi crisis, in "Middle East Journal," Winter 1971, pp. 79 ff. more important than Germany. This role is difficult to explain solely by the fact that there was an Italian diplomatic representation in Baghdad, while the Germans did not have one, since in other, less serious circumstances, the al-Gaylani government had habitually used its own representations in neighboring neutral countries for relations with Berlin. It is therefore natural to think that there were other reasons behind his decision to turn primarily to Italy, probably the conviction that Rome was more interested than Berlin in the Middle East and therefore more willing to commit itself to supporting it. What is certain is that at the end of 1940, when British pressure became increasingly strong and pressing, the Iraqi government turned to Italy to find out "if and to what extent" they could count on political support (mainly to prevent Turkey and Iran from joining forces with Britain in the event of military action) economic aid and military assistance from the Axis. It was Rome that forwarded its requests to Berlin (poorly and

badly informed about the situation in Iraq), urging a concrete study and, again, advocating that the Japanese government consider a request for aid that Baghdad had also made to Tokyo and which, all things considered, might appear the most realistic, given that at theJapan was still neutral at the time and could send it directly by sea, while Italian and German aid would have had to be sent either through a neutral country or, in derogation from the terms of the armistices with France, via Syria. All this while at the same time trying to persuade el Gaylani to exercise caution and prevent the situation from deteriorating. El Gaylani's resignation at the end of January 1941 and the formation of Taha el Haschimi's 'centrist' but essentially pro-British government represented only a temporary setback for Italy's commitment to supporting IraqIraq. Although placed in a sort of quarantine by the new government and under the threat of an imminent break in diplomatic relations between the two countries, the representation in Baghdad remained in secret contact with el Gaylani and the Mufti, who immediately began plotting to regain power with the support of thearmy (whose leaders were largely anti-British) and, with this in mind, insisted that thethe Axis to arrange without delay for the shipment of arms and ammunition so that they could face the British reaction once they had regained power, and they (the Mufti) spoke of unleashing guerrilla warfare in Palestine. Thus, the military coup that brought el Gaylani back to power for the last time in early April not only did not take Rome by surprise, but, coinciding with the Axis successes in the Balkans and North Africa, whose immediate repercussions in the Middle East and Egypt in particular were quite significant, it prompted Rome to entertain the idea that the war was about to enter a new and decisive phase in which Iraq, with appropriate help and advice, could play an important role, both by diverting British troops that might otherwise have flocked to Egypt and by becoming a point of reference and aggregation for anti-British movements and, finally, by making it more difficult for the British to influence countries such as Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Given Italy's ability to manage and, even more so, to actually implement it, this idea was certainly nothing more than a pipe dream. However, if Germany had also committed itself fully to its implementation, it might have proved much less unrealistic than it might appear at first glance. Today, we know that the real year of crisis for Britain was 194141, mainly due to the situation that had arisen in the Mediterranean with the victorious Italian-German counteroffensive in Cyrenaica (on April 14, Axis troops reached Sollum) and the occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece, and in particular Crete (May 20-June 3). From this point of view, the situation that arose thethe following year with Rommel's offensive in Egypt would be, despite its seriousness, much less dramatic because the United States was now directly involved in the conflict, Germany had the bulk of its forces engaged in the USSR, andEngland no longer had uncontrolled situations behind Egypt and had access to supplies that a year earlier had been very limited; not to mention certain choices regarding the two opposing blocs that in 1941 could still be considered uncertain, particularly that of Spain, and which by 1942 had become clear. The correspondence between Churchill and Roosevelt clearly suggests that between March and June 1941, London was preoccupied with the prospect of a collapse of the entire Middle Eastern defense system (which it feared could have repercussions on the situation in India) and the need to prevent this at all costs and as quickly as possible, before the breach that had opened up in Iraq could widen and throw the

entire Middle East into crisis. To Roosevelt, who seemed to underestimate the consequences of a German advance in the Mediterranean and considered the problem of Iraq only in terms of the availability of its oil wells, which, in any case, could be rendered unusable if necessary, Churchill replied on May 3, 1941, painting a much bleaker and more realistic picture: We must not be too sure that the loss of Egypt and the Middle East would not have serious consequences. It would considerably worsen conditions and difficulties in the Atlantic and Pacific and would almost certainly lead to a prolongation of the war with all the suffering and military dangers that this would entail. We will continue to fight, whatever happens, but please remember that the attitude of Spain, Vichy, Turkey, and Japan could ultimately be determined by the outcome of the struggle in this theater of operations. I cannot share the view that the loss ofEgypt and the Middle East would be merely a preliminary to a prolonged oceanic war, crowned with ultimate success. If all of Europe, most of Asia, and Africa were to become part of the Axis system, either through conquest or through agreements forced by force, a war waged by the British Isles, the United States, Canada, and Australia against this powerful organization would be aarduous, long, and nerve-wracking undertaking. Consequently, if you cannot take a more advanced position immediately, or very soon, it is possible that thethe general balance be seriously disturbed to our disadvantage. Mr. President, I am sure you will not misunderstand me if I tell you exactly what I think. The only decisive counterbalance I can imagine to the growing pessimism in Turkey, the Near East, and Spain would be the immediate intervention of the United States on our side as a belligerent power. If this were possible, I have little doubt that we could maintain the situation in the Mediterranean until the weight of your supplies gives us victory. If we refer to the crucial months of April, May, June, and July, during which both the Anglo-Iraqi conflict and the British occupation of Syria took place, there is no doubt that, despite Churchill's urgent appeals, thethe American contribution to plugging the gap that had opened up in the Middle East with the return to power of el Gaylani, with theItalian-German advance beyond the Libyan-Egyptian border and the availability of the air bases in Crete to the Axis, was certainly not the decisive factor. If the situation in the Middle East did not degenerate into a serious setback for the British, the full consequences of which are difficult to assess but which would in any case have had a very serious impact on the subsequent course of the war in the Mediterranean and also in other theaters, it was, on the one hand, thanks to the British and, on the other, the fault, so to speak, of Hitler. The British, and Churchill in particular, deserve credit for reacting to el Gaylani's return to power with extreme promptness and energy, quickly defeating the Axis despite all the difficulties of the moment and General Wavell's fears and uncertainties, the Axis, and pushing Tiralle to react to the reinforcement of the Habbaniya air base and the occupation of Basra before the Germans and Italians were able to effectively help him. In other words, he risked everything, and if the Italian-German reaction had been greater and, above all, more timely, thethe inadequacy of the British forces available to counter it would have become immediately apparent. Thus, in Churchill's words, prompt intervention by airborne troops would have 'delivered Syria, Iraq, and Persia with their precious oil fields' and 'Hitler's hand could have stretched far into India and beckoned to Japan'. Hitler's 'fault' was that he not realizing the full importance of the opportunity the Axis had to "achieve a great success with

little risk"2 or for having given it up so as not to delay or weaken the attack on the Soviet Union and thus limiting himself to a belated intervention of very modest proportions, not enough to really help the Iraqis. As we have already mentioned, on January 20, the Mufti had addressed Hitler with a long letter whose primary purpose was to solicit his personal interest in favor of the increasingly troubled el Gay, which was now in increasing difficulty. In the letter, however, the Mufti had wisely placed the emphasis not so much on Iraq as on the Arabs as a whole, and in particular on the Palestinians, Syrians, and Egyptians, on their hostility towards England, their strategic position which could "endanger imperial communications and make any contact between India and the Mediterranean and Turkey via the Persian Gulf precarious, with the consequent end of exploitation and oil flow to England's advantage," their "warmest sympathy" "for Germany and the Axis," their willingness to react everywhere against the common enemy and to side with the Axis "to do their part for the deserved defeat of the Anglo-Jewish coalition." He concluded in a manner that was both drastic and cryptic: "I can resolutely add that the Arabs are willing to throw their weight into the balance and offer their blood in the sacred struggle for their rights and national aspirations, provided that certain moral and material concerns are guaranteed." The letter was clearly preliminary in nature and suggests that, before laying his cards on the table, the Mufti was waiting to see the German reaction. At the time, however, there was no response, probably because the fall of the al-Gaylani government a few days later had, in Berlin's eyes, much of its immediate interest. The Mufti did not give up, however. On March 1, his private secretary, Tevfick el Shakir, who was about to return to Baghdad, delivered to the Wilhelmstrasse a draft of an eight-point "Declaration of Germany and Italy concerning the Arab Countries," which clarified the "concerns" the Mufti had mentioned in his letter to Hitler. With meticulous precision, the draft listed all the Arab countries whose "complete independence" was to be recognized by the Axis: Iraq, Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Palestine, Transjordan, Kuwait, Dubai, Oman, Hadramout, Syria, and Lebanon. Italy would have been assured, in agreement with the Egyptian government, only of 'imperial communications' through Sudan. Any kind of mandate solution was explicitly excluded. The Axis also had to recognize the right of the Arab peoples to unite in one or more federations and to resolve the problem of the Jewish National Home in Palestine, whose 'illegality' it also had to recognize. Finally, future economic cooperation would have to be based on mutual interests. This time, Berlin's reaction was prompt and, in its own way, positive, even if, on the one hand, it tended only to exploit the Arabs in general and the Iraqis in particular and, on the other hand, it was based on a poor understanding of Arab psychology (and, initially, of the real situation in Iraq) and an underestimation of the British capacity for reaction. 'Taking into account strictly German interests', reads an internal note from the Wilhelmstrasse dated March 7, the Mufti's plan did not raise any reservations on the German side: "the apathy of the Arabs" would in fact easily ensure Germany'sinfluence over a future great Arab empire. As for the Iraqis, according to the head of the political section of Wilhelmstrasse itself, Ernst Woermann, what mattered at that moment was to keep their trust in Germany alive, "so that Iraq will strike when the overall military and political situation makes such action desirable." To explain this change of attitude, which would materialize on April 8 in a letter from von Weizsäcker to the Mufti, which recognized the

principle of full independence for Arab countries and promised immediate German military and financial support in the event that Iraq had to defend itself against the British, we must first refer to the efforts that the Army and Navy General Staff had been making for some time to counter Hitler's "eastern" strategy with a Mediterranean alternative. Remaining outside Hitler's door for a long time, the 'Mediterranean strategy', advocated, albeit with different nuances, by Raeder, Jodl, and Haider, had penetrated it to some extent in recent months through the window, in step with the need to rush to Italy's aid in Greece and North Africa. While rejecting it as an alternative to action "in the east," the Führer had ended up considering it for 'after Barbarossa', i.e. after the fall of 1941, when, according to his calculations, the USSR would be out of the game. Then, and only then (it is significant that the two interventions to help Italy were not coordinated in any way), would Germany engage in a major action in the Middle East that could also extend to India. For the time being, all this remained at the stage of a mere plan, but it did have an influence on particular strategic choices, such as giving priority to the occupation of Crete over that of Malta, and, more importantly, adopted by Hitler, as evidenced by the draft of "Directive No. 32" drawn up in early June concerning preparations for "after Barbarossa": "after the annihilation of the Russian-Soviet armed forces" and the Axis's achievement of military domination over continental Europe, a concentric attack would be launched against British positions in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, from Bulgaria through Turkey, from Libya through Egypt and, if conditions allowed, from Transcaucasia through Iran. In this perspective, it is clear that all Arab assets became important. Hence a new, keen interest in all advances and possible contacts concerning the Arabs. This also led to Weizsäcker's letter to the Mufti, which must have been considered all the more urgent and important in Berlin given that al-Gaylani had returned to power in the meantime, but which, in hindsight, would soon prove to be a big mistake. At that moment, the letter to the Mufti had only one purpose: to keep alive and increase Arab confidence in Germany and, as far as Iraq was concerned, to keep it under pressure so that it could be used at the right moment as a bridgehead in the Middle East. Iraq, to keep pressure on it so that it could be used at the right moment as a bridgehead in the Middle East. In reality, as Hillgruber rightly noted, it "had to be considered by the nationalist group in Baghdad as a kind of blank check to attack." This was all the more so because, immediately after it was sent, Berlin compounded its mistake by advising the Iraqi government "to begin armed resistance against England as soon as there was a chance of success, according to the balance of forces." This is not to say, let's be clear, that it was Germany that provokedthe Anglo-Iraqi conflict, because Churchill was determined to try to eradicate the Iraqi problem before it could spread and be exploited by the Axis to undermine the entire British system in the Middle East, and he would have acted even if the Iraqis had taken a more cautious approach. However, it seems difficult to deny that Germany's behavior shortened the time it took for the crisis to escalate and helped the Britishto extend it from Iraq to Syria. All this without any compensation, because if, at first, some advantage could be gained in terms of propaganda (both in the more general sense of anti-British propaganda among the Arabs and in the more specific and internal German sense of diverting attention from the 'Hess affair'), the price was inevitably high in this area too when it became apparent that the Axis was unable to provide effective help to Iraq. This

was not so much due to insurmountable objective difficulties, but because effective intervention in terms of men and resources to support the el Gaylani regime had not even been seriously considered, and when it was belatedly decided upon, on the one hand there was not enough time to carry it out and, on the other hand, it was thought that it could be dealt with, at least in part, by drawing on French arms depots in Syria, with the double consequence of having to waste more time in negotiations with Vichy and pushing the British even further to hasten their intervention in Syria. All this, finally, on Hitler's part, amid uncertainties and second thoughts, which meant that he only decided to truly support Iraq on May 23, a week before the conflict ended and el Gaylani and the Mufti had to take refuge in Tehran. Compared to the German compromise, the Italian compromise was not without its flaws, but it was not without its flaws either. May 23, a week before the conflict ended and al-Gaylani and the Mufti had to take refuge in Tehran. Compared to the German one, the Italian compromise, although not without faults and errors, appears on the whole more straightforward and, above all, more cautious and less instrumental. The biggest mistake made by Palazzo Chigi was to have "allowed'3 Weizsäcker's letter to the Mufti and not protesting against the subsequent dispatch in which Berlin advised Baghdad to start 'armed resistance' against the British as soon as there was, 'according to the report on the balance of forces'. Since Rome was well aware of the psychology of the Arabs and, compared to Berlin, had a much more realistic and, more importantly, first-hand picture of the situation in Iraq and of al-Gaylani's intentions to wage war to the bitter end even before he returned to power4, such a mistake can only be explained by For these negotiations, see 1. Lipschits, La politìque de la France au Levant (1939-1941), Paris-Amsterdam 1963, pp. 90 ff.; L. Hirszovicz, The Third Reich and the Arab, op. cit., pp. 159 ff.; as well as Le procès du général Denti, op. cit., pp. 169 ff. and in particular pp. 347 ff. (protocol of negotiations); R. Rahn, Ambasciatore di Hitler a Vichy e a Salò, Milan 1950, pp. 175 ff. See A. Hillgruber, La strategia militare di Hitler cit., pp. 525 ff. The term, which reveals a whole state of mind, is found in a telegram from Anfuso to Alfieri dated April 8 (cf. DDI, s. IX, VI, p. 826). On February 14, Gabrielli sent a summary by courier to Rome of the conversation that the first secretary of his Legation had had with el Gaylani on the night of February 3. The conversation is extremely interesting, both in terms of reconstructing the events that led to el Gaylani's removal from the government and his plans for the future: "I ask him to explain the reasons for his resignation on 30th, which was totally unexpected after the conversation he had with me on the evening of the 29th, during which he assured me of his decision to remain in power while waiting for the Axis governments to define the terms for urgent aid. r. During a meeting on the morning of the 30th, I realized that the British agents had managed to turn the majority of Parliament against me, which, after all, having been elected during Nuri Said's presidency of the Council, had always been covertly rebellious towards me. In agreement with my colleagues in the Cabinet, I therefore decided to dissolve the Chamber of Deputies in order to give the people, the vast majority of whom are with me and againstEngland, to express their opinion in a plebiscite. At around 2 p.m., I went to the Regent to submit the relevant decree, as well as another decree accepting the resignation of Taha el-Hascimi as Minister of War and conferring the interim leadership of the Ministry on the Prime Minister. The Regent raised no objections and promised to return the signed

decrees to me after an hour. I waited all afternoon. Towards evening, several signs led me to believe that the Regent was plotting something with the British Embassy. Together with the Chief of Staff of the Army, I decided to go to the Regent's private residence to put an end to the intrigues. I learned that the Emir had left for Divaniya in the early afternoon. That same evening, I received news that the Regent had appealedappealed to the hospitality of the Commander of the Divaniya Division and the Shiite tribal leaders, claiming that his life was in danger. Although none of his hosts had any sympathy for the Emir, their sense of dutyhospitality advised them to take him under their protection. The whole plot had been ordered by the British Embassy to prevent the dissolution of Parliament, to keep the Regent in their hands halfway between Baghdad and Bassura, and to force me to choose between resignation or the use of armed force against the Regent and the populations held to defend the state of frustration and subjugation to the Germans that characterized Italian politics at that time following the resounding failure of the Greek campaign and the humiliating necessity in which Italy found itself of invoking theGermany's help. Contrary to respect for the rules of hospitality. A march by the Baghdad divisions on Divaniya would perhaps have provoked a civil war and certainly an intervention by British forces in the area most favorable to them, given the proximity of Basra and the Sheiba base. I would not have hesitated even in the face of this eventuality if I had already received the weapons requested from the Axis governments, and above all if I had had the certainty that the Iraqi army would be supplied with weapons and ammunition through Iran during the operations that were about to begin. I therefore had no choice but to resign. I would like to inform you that, at the same time as your resignation, we were informed by Rome that the subject of our last conversations is currently being discussed between the Italian and German governments. Of course, it remains to be seen whether or not the conversations can continue with the Taha el-Hascimi government. I invite you to clarify your point of view on this matter. A. I rule out the possibility that you can continue negotiations with Taha. His position is extremely uncertain. He is at odds with the army leaders. The British are under the illusion that he will succeed in bringing them back into line. They are mistaken. Even today, they came to consult about the situation. Taha also came to ask me to help him in his so-called pacification effort. I replied that an essential condition is a declaration by him that my policy will be continued and completed and that nothing will change in Iraq's foreign policy, including, first and foremost, the maintenance of diplomatic relations with Italy.Italy. He promised that he would make a statement to that effect. But I don't believe it. Taha is an extremely uncertain man. I would not be surprised if he had already agreed to the free passage of British troops through Iraq. In any case, the British now have the man with whom they can negotiate such matters. What I can tell you is that it will not last. There will be days or weeks of waiting, and we will see new changes. The whole country is with me. My letter of resignation has finally opened the eyes of even those who do not want to see. Hostilities are now open between England and me, and behind me stands the whole country, the army, the tribal chiefs, etc. I ask him how he intends to put so much force at the service of Iraq's interests. r. My plan is decided. It won't be long before I am called back to power. I can assure you that within two months, one way or another, the Regent will be swept away. As soon as I return to power, my first act will be to denounce the Treaty of

Alliance withEngland. Of course, I am counting on the help of Rome and Berlin. In the meantime, you must prepare everything I have asked for, doubling and tripling it: first and foremost, weapons and ammunition. When I know that there are weapons and ammunition at our disposal on the Iranian border and that supplies can be continued without interruption along the same route, I will break all hesitation. Tell Rome that no more time should be wasted. Why don't you bomb Habbaniya and Sheiba? Such an act would demonstrate the Axis's interest in the situation in Iraq, encourage thethe army not to be overwhelmed, would make it better consider the dangers to which Iraq is exposed due to my removal from the government, and would arouse in all Arab countries a great movement of sympathy for the Axis, which would demonstrate its support, in my person, for the only Arab leader who dared to take a stand against Great Britain. Suggest to Rome and Berlin that a strong radio campaign. With my letter of resignation, I have done your propaganda an incalculable service. The Bari radio station should extol Gailani's program to bring ITrak to true independence from England, omitting attacks on Taha and the Regent to avoid pretexts for breaking diplomatic relations. The Berlin radio station, on the other hand, could attack Taha and the Regent without any regard. Bombard and agitate the country with radio and send weapons and ammunition to the border with Iran. I tell him that there are many rumors about the possibility of his arrest or confinement. R. They won't dare. They are monitoring my every move, so our contacts must be cautious. The only thing the British can do is kill me. But the reaction frightens them. I tell him that, although I have no instructions, I am sure I am interpreting the Italian government's thinking by assuring him of our assistance. I suggest that, if he does not feel safe here and suddenly decides to cross the border, he should avoid going to Syria, as his relatives advise, but take refuge in Iran, i.e., go to meet the Axis weapons and ammunition. R. Thank you, I will bear that in mind. Insist with Rome on the arms and ammunition. Finally, it is agreed that, unless otherwise instructed by the Royal Government, the Royal Legation's relations with the current Cabinet will be formal, leaving Taha to take the initiative in any conversations with us. Contacts with Gailani will continue in order to finalize the subject of previous conversations (military and economic assistance-financial assistance) (asmae, Iraq, b. 8 (1^41), phase. 1). Berlin and Rome were in fact aware of the risk that the Iraqis, if they felt guaranteed by Germany and Italy, would precipitate the crisis and take the field against the British before the Axis was able to help them adequately. The communications that had taken place since el Gaylani's return to power with the representatives in Baghdad and Berlin and the internal documentation of Palazzo Chigi are eloquent in this regard and also make it clear that Rome was unaware of Germany's true intentions. As Gabrielli suggested from Baghdad, from April 8 onwards, Rome tried to persuade the Iraqis to avoid the outbreak of armed conflict before the Axis was able to at least provide them with the means and weapons they required. However, keeping them in check proved more difficult than expected. On April 17, al-Gaylani began to demand with increasing insistence not only that preparations for supplies be accelerated and that these take place by air, but also that, if things came to a head, the Axis send its own air units (on May 4, he would say to Gabrielli, "our salvation can come only come from the arrival of friendly aircraft") and bomb Basra, Habbaniya, Sheiba, and possibly Amman. In line with the German position, the Italian response to these requests

was initially fairly vague. In early May, when the situation began to worsen and Palazzo Chigi was led "to believe that the German government was concerned about not committing its military forces in a struggle that did not look favorable for ITrak and was taking place at such a great distance', Rome tried, within the limits of its limited possibilities, to take a clearer stance, both in terms of direct involvement and in terms of more direct action than had been taken up to that point (essentially acting as an intermediary for Baghdad's request) on Berlin to persuade it to provide concrete help to the Iraqis, and, finally, by making a renewed effort to convince Tokyo of theopportunity to help them to some extent. All in all, this was not so much because it harbored great illusions about the possibility of Iraq's resistance sparking a vast anti-British movement in the Middle East or, at least, as the Mufti assured, a revolt in Palestine and Transjordan, but rather because it was essentially looking to the future, to the prestige and credibility of the Axis and of Italy in particular among the Arabs. A note prepared by the Directorate of European Mediterranean Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on May 6 for Ciano, which he in turn submitted in a somewhat attenuated form to Mussolini, is significant in this regard: The Axis Powers did not push the Baghdad government to start armed struggle against Great Britain. Their statements to Gailani were cautious and with implicit reservations. However, the fact remains that today the conflict has broken out, and that the Gailani government considers the Axis Powers morally committed to helping it and is calling for the assistance of their air forces. The Iraqi people fully support the Gailani government and expect the Axis Powers to contribute in some way to the fight against their common enemy. The entire Arab world shares the Iraqi people's expectations. The moral effect that even modest military aid from the Axis would have on the Iraqi army could be decisive for the outcome of the conflict in Iraq. In Palestine and Transjordan, Palestinian nationalists and Bedouins could also be prompted to engage British troops. In Saudi Arabia, Ibn Saud could be induced to abandon his reserved attitude. The entire Middle East would side against Great Britain. The latter's military task would be made much more difficult, with favorable effects for the Axis even in Egypt and the Arabian Peninsula.. On the other hand, even if the help of the Axis Powers were not sufficient to determine the Iraqi victory, the military prestige of the Axis Powers would not be shaken if it were made publicly known that Iraq had begun the fight on its own initiative and that the Axis PowersAxis Powers intervened as far as possible and not to fulfill pre-existing commitments. Conversely, not granting any military aid would have clearly unfavorable consequences for the prestige of the Axis Powers in Iraq and throughout the Arab world: the Arabs would feel abandoned and betrayed by them. Our policy towards the Arab world would suffer for a long time, with harmful effects for the future development of the struggle against England throughout the Middle East. At the meeting in Merano on May 13-15 between the chairmen of the armistice commissions with France, the Germans who supported the thesis ofsupport for the Arab movement in the Middle East essentially only "as a means of forcing Great Britain to increasingly disperse its forces," spoke mainly of purchasing weapons and ammunition from the French in Syria and then sending them to Iraq via Turkey, which also involved negotiations with Ankara, and tended to shift the greater burden of any direct intervention onto the Italians. The Italians responded by asking that their Supreme Command be placed on the same level as the German command with

regard to the Iraqi problem, pointing out that Italy was already doing everything it could to deal with a further probable worsening of the situation. On May 7, Mussolini, who had been following developments in Iraq with great attention from the outset and, after theoccupation of Greece, was now thinking of conquering not only Crete but also Cyprus, broke the deadlock and ordered the Supreme Command to prepare a bomber squadron and a fighter squadron for use in Iraq, as well as 400 light machine guns and several 20 mm batteries (16 pieces) with ammunition to be sent by air as requested by el Gaylani. It is difficult to say whether and to what extent Mussolini's decision contributed to accelerating German preparations (the first Luftwaffe planes arrived in Iraq on May 15) and to prompting Hitler to issue, on May 23, 'Directive No. 30', which formally sanctioned the decision to come to Iraq's aid with the aim, for the time being, to engage British forces there at the expense of other theaters of operation. What is certain is that, in any case, it proved too late and, therefore, unable to have a military impact on the outcome of the Anglo-Iraqi conflict, even though, in truth, when Mussolini made his decision, the Iraqis' chances of success had already been largely compromised, primarily by decision and the speed with which Churchill had acted as soon as al-Gaylani had regained power and, secondarily, by the lack of political flexibility, i.e., the inability to stall and thus try to give the Germans and Italians time to intervene and, even more so, to coordinate to some extent the operations in Iraq with those in Greece and Crete, as demonstrated by the Baghdad government. As far as we have been able to reconstruct on the basis of Air Force documentation, a total of eleven air transports were carried out by the Italians (the first three S 82s arrived in Mosul on May 16), carrying 16,500 kg of war material. Despite Mussolini's urgings, only one of the two squadrons planned for Iraq was deployed, the fighter squadron (11 CR 42s with their support and transport aircraft), which, arriving (via Rhodes-Aleppo-Mosul) in Kirkuk on May 28, participated in only the last two days of the conflict, after which, with Iraqi resistance having ceased and the Luftwaffe having already departed, it returned to Italy. Although greatly reduced in both quantity and duration, theintervention was, from a technical point of view, fairly well prepared and conducted: the choice of personnel who, in part, had knowledge of the country, having already been there as instructors or aeronautical technicians, proved particularly useful. During the three days it was in Iraq, the squadron (under the command of Captains C. Bertotto and F. Sforza) carried out various missions in support of the Iraqi combat troops and engaged in some combatwith the RAF, shooting down two Glosters and seriously damaging a third. An Italian fighter was shot down and two others (in addition to an S 79 support aircraft) were lost on the ground. The double setback suffered first in Iraq and then in Syria did not produce any fundamental changes in Italy's Arab policy. In a certain sense, it can even be said that, considering how things had unfolded, it confirmed its validity not only in the eyes of Mussolini, but also in the eyes of Palazzo Chigi and the Supreme Command. Although el Gaylani's regime had been overthrown and Iraq and Syria occupied by the British, the Iraqi affair appeared to them in a substantially non-negative light, since the main responsibility for the setback was attributed to the hastiness with which Baghdad had moved and to the procrastination and delays of the Germans. The behavior of the French in Syria confirmed the validity of Mussolini's anti-French prejudice and his disagreement with Berlin regarding the policy to

be adopted towards Vichy. Finally, the news coming from the Arab countries suggested that the balance between the positives (military success) and the negatives (the emotional and political reaction of the Arabs) was, all things considered, negative for the moment and, therefore, potentially positive for the Axis if it had been able to exploit the opportunities offered by the situation that had arisen. So much so that it was precisely after the Iraqi affair that the Italians began to pay greater attention to the possibility of combining Arab policy with Indian policy, which had been under consideration for some time but had never been implemented in any operational terms. The only doubts, if they can be called thatcame from Ciano, whose criticism and skepticism were almost one and the same, as we shall see later, with a sort of polemical revenge against what had been done, and those who had done it, in the previous months, when, after the dramatic failure of the attack on Greece, he had not only been thethe primary target of all criticism and attacks, both political and personal, but had also been partially marginalized from the leadership of foreign policy, so much so that many had hoped for his removal. Nor, on the other hand, can another fact be underestimated: the course that the war had taken and was taking even more, and the type of relations with Germany that this course had determined and was determining every day more and more, forced Mussolini, and even more so Palazzo Chigi, to review and reset much of the political strategy on which they had acted in the previous year. Hence the need, on the one hand, to abandon or at least shelve some of the more ambitious programs or those that would have led to friction and clashes with the ally that Italy could not afford, and, on the other hand, to focus on defending and implementing those considered most vital and in relation to which it was thought that German dynamism and "bad faith" would be less likely to manifest themselves or that, in any case, could be countered and, at worst, negotiated. Among these programs, the most important and decisive, so much so as to constitute the objective, the raison d'être of Italy's participation in the war, was clearly becoming increasingly the "Mediterranean expansion" and, therefore, the creation of a new order in the central-eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East that would guarantee Fascist Italy its own effective "living space" andpolitical and economic hegemony over the entire region. At this point, this was true not only for Mussolini, but also for Palazzo Chigi, for whom, in fact, in 1941, policy towards the Arabs took on a central strategic role with respect to the rest of Italian politics and was practically without alternative. Long and oscillating between the poles of utopia and realism, between the old rhetoric about Italy's Mediterranean vocation and the more modern Machiavellianism disguised with good intentions dictated by the necessity that came from weakness, a secret study ("Political program of action in Iraq and economic development of the country") prepared in January 1942 by the offices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs1 seems to us to be very significant in this regard and, above all, allows us to glimpse to some extent what outlets were envisaged for Italian policy in the Middle East after the war. Among other things, it reads: ... Now the new Italy that will emerge from the victorious World War, operating in its revolution, will have to implement its great plans for collaboration with the countries of the Near and Middle East in the political, cultural, and economic spheres, with particular regard to the centuries-old tendencies of Italian expansion. The Mediterranean living space must constitute the common link between all the various Mediterranean nations in order to ensure a fruitful

and lasting peace and the progressive development of all the states whose shores are bathed by that sea. In this great organization, a true 'Mediterranean Commonwealth', which could be called the 'Mediterranean Empire', would include (in addition to Cyprus, Greece, and Spain) all the various states of the Eastern Mediterranean, European (Turkey), Asian, and African, that is, all the peoples who directly or indirectly face the old Mediterranean basin, through the effective unity and interdependence between Europe, Asia, and Africa. Of these, the states of Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and Transjordan have been influenced by Mediterranean civilization, that is, Roman, that is, Italian; others, such as Iraq, are necessarily attracted to that civilization. Its strategic position, great potential for progress, the ease and speed now achieved in communications increasingly bind its existence to the eastern shores of the Mediterranean. Finally, others such as Saudi Arabia and Yemen must be considered as integral elements, because the Saudi and Yemeni coasts are part of that complex system that is the Red Sea, the freedom of which is no less indispensable than that of the Mediterranean, of which it is but a natural continuation. This future organization must appear as the definitive liquidation of an old world that no longer responds to the new ideals that guide and sustain peoples, ideals based on political and social order, justice, equity and equal rights, the balance of wealth in relation to work, and the definition of nationalities aspiring to group themselves into instinctive nuclei operating in a common life and in mutual harmony. The abolition of rivalries for the conquest of markets and access to raw materials must stifle any antagonism. This grandiose movement leading to the union of all peoples polarized towards the same sea must be framed within the new economic order by systems of trade through barter (supplies of industrial products in exchange for agricultural products and raw materials), multilateral compensation agreements, and intense and continuous collaboration in the political, commercial, and financial fields. Italy must help to rebuild ethnic entities that the violence of wars and peace had dispersed and disrupted (Armenians, Assyrians, Kurds); favor Arab populations who yearn for the regular and legal establishment of their nationality; ensure the independence of the Arab states of the Near and Middle East with asmae, Political Affairs, Iraq, b. 18,1941, phase. 1. each of which Italy will have to be bound by a treaty of alliance and cooperation, contribute to the solution of the question of the Holy Places, which is imperative, and not only for reasons of prestige, for a Catholic nation such as ours, the cradle and seat of the Church of Rome. Italy will have to contribute to the great work of industrialization of the countries of theby creating factories and workshops, power stations, refineries, sugar factories, weaving mills; equipping ports; building road and rail communications; bridges; improving housing in urban centers. Intensive collaboration, therefore, led by Italy, with the East; collaboration that is economic, commercial, and cultural, which allows for active collaboration on a political level in case of need. This collaboration could take place either with a unified Arab state based on administrative decentralization or with various free and independent states, each living its own life. The union of the various Arab countries concerned should only be achieved if such a decision is expressed by the will of the people. However, it must be considered that even today Arabism is far from ready to resolve the Eastern question in its favor. The possibility of Arab-Muslim political unity-Muslim unity still appears to be an aspiration of idealistic intellectuals. It is made difficult to achieve by the lack of a spirit of

unity among the Arabs themselves. No Muslim country has sufficient political, religious, or economic superiority to impose itself decisively on the others. On the other hand, it may be dangerous to excessively encourage extreme nationalistic and pan-Arabist tendencies, which today seem particularly prone to fanaticism. Italy will therefore find itself in contact either with a unified state governed by a monarchy or a republic, which could include only the Arab countries of East Asia, centered on Baghdad and Damascus, a considerable bloc of over 16 million inhabitants and a significant sum of interests; or with several small independent states, namely a Kingdom of Egypt, a Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a Kingdom of Yemen, a Kingdom ofIran, a State of Palestine and Transjordan, a State of Lebanon, and a State of Syria. The question of the two countries (States of the Levant) already under French Mandate is also not very easy to resolve. Lebanon is Christian Catholic in character and autonomous by long historical tradition; Syria is purely Islamic in character. Certainly, separating Lebanon from Syria would mean delaying the fusion of the two territories that, if united, would need to integrate (Lebanon with its ports, Syria with its agricultural production), and would mean not facilitating the connection between the inland region and the coastal region, between mountainous Lebanon and the fertile plains of the hinterland, accentuating two different economies and hindering their interpenetration. But it is also certain that between Christian Arabs and Muslim Arabs there exists a state ofcharacterized by rivalry and hatred, which, while it may have benefited the policy of the Mandatory Power (based on the protection and predominance of the Maronites), it will make their peaceful coexistence within the same state extremely precarious. It is therefore highly likely that Beirut and the Maronites and Melkites of Lebanon will never agree to be part of a Syrian union and allow themselves, as Catholics and more progressive, to be incorporated as a minority province within the borders of Muslim and less developed 'Greater Syria'. A delimitation of the borders between Syria and Lebanon would be desirable for the future tranquility of that area. Given the peculiar geographical unity of Syria, it could result in a kind of federal state (similar to the legal structure of Switzerland) consisting of various regional autonomies, with the abolition of the divisions implemented and the consequent amendment of the previously granted regulations (Alauiti, Gebel Druso, etc.). It will be necessary for us to establish and maintain these relations with the Arab states of the East by means of a cautious and prudent policy, without arousing apprehension, that is, without showing dangerous tendencies toward domination. Within the future Mediterranean organization, each country will be free to provide for its own progress according to its own inclinations and aptitudes, without political hegemony or economic tyranny, that is, on a common plan of social order, economic security, political equity, with concrete reconciliation and mutual integration of interests. Therefore, there will be no satellites and no major stars. Italy itself will be considered 'first among equals'. Italian power will, by virtue of historical tradition (because the history of Italy is entirely Mediterranean), be the regulating and central pendulum of the great basin that has shaped world civilization. The redemption that theAxis offers to the Arab populations of the East is based on the constructive and civilizing work that will constitute their mission of tomorrow and on the concept of a superior elaboration of solidarity among the various Mediterranean political autonomies, which must replace the already worn-out concept of "absolute independence,"

which inevitably leads to hegemonic tendencies and dangerous antagonisms. Until the conclusion of the Anglo-Iraqi conflict-Iraqi conflict, policy towards the Arabs (states, political parties and movements, media, individuals, etc.) had been managed directly by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which, although it had delegated certain specific aspects to the Ministry of Popular Culture, to theItalian Africa (very few and of little importance, since there was always a margin of dissent and competition between the Foreign Ministry and Italian Africa on this matter), the SIM and, in recent times, the Supreme Command, it had nevertheless firmly kept in its own hands not onlythe conception and direction, but also the management, using the contribution of other administrations only for specific technical and subsidiary aspects. In the second half of 1941, this situation underwent a certain change. The growing awareness that the war would be anything but short and would be decided on the battlefield rather than at the negotiating table, the reduction in the number of diplomatic representations and official support points in Arab countries (after those in Iraq and Syria, in September, as a result of the Anglo-Soviet occupation, those in Iran also disappeared), the new characteristics that Italian and German political action had to take on in those countries and, finally, the connection that was established between part of it (that in loco) and the conduct of military operations meant that, while remaining under the jurisdiction of Palazzo Chigi, Arab policy was essentially managed on the basis of a sort of improper partnershipbetween the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Supreme Command and, for the latter, above all the SIM. This, among other things, also explains the difference in the quantity of available documentation: abundant in the case of the Foreign Ministry, very scarce in the case of the SIM, giving only a very pale idea of the activity (partly delegated to it, partly conceived autonomously) carried out by the SIM, which was far from insignificant. The few elements available on the activities carried out by the SIM suggest that the study of its organization began in the last months of 1941 and the first months of 1942 under a series of stimuli: the German operations in Russia, which, even if they had not achieved the results proposed by Hitler, suggested that their spring resumption would lead the Wehrmacht to invade the Middle East from the Caucasus; Japan's entry into the war, which gave substance to the hitherto vague plans to link policy towards the Arabs with that towards the Indians; and, finally, the halting of Auchinleck's counteroffensive in Cyrenaica and Rommel's preparations to go on the offensive himself. Nor can we ignore the proposals for the establishment of a liaison and information center in Iran, which Minister Petrucci had submitted to Palazzo Chigi in July (but a similar proposal had already been made by Gabrielli at the beginning of the year, when el Gaylani was forced to resign) and which the latter had approved and forwarded "for the military" to the Supreme Command. What is certain is that in November 1941, the Foreign Ministry and the Supreme Command studied a four-point action plan: 1) to recruit a certain number of Arab refugees and train them, according to their aptitudes, as paratroopers, sappers, and radio operators; 2) to train a military mission "for when the anti-British revolt should resume"; 3) 'establish as soon as possible any communication system that could be implemented with the Arab countries occupied by the British, relying initially on reliable elements who still had the possibility of crossing the borders' and then set up clandestine radio stations supported by 'loyal centers'; 4) organize sabotage activities to keep anti-British agitation alive, targeting mainly

bridges, railways, and pipelines.emporaneously, Mussolini, partly out of conviction and partly to keep the Mufti close to him, who had arrived in Italy in the meantime, as we shall see shortly,had put forward and to prevent the Germans from implementing it, approved the proposal to establish an Arab Legion, to be recruited from among refugees, residents, and prisoners from the Middle East, "intended to be used, when circumstances permit, against the British in the Middle East." Entrusted to the Supreme Command, its implementation was practically delegated to the sim. This first phase of study and political launch in April-May 1942, parallel to the preparation of the Italian-German offensive in Egypt and the German offensive towards the Caucasus, a second, more operational phase was launched with a view to a possible landing in Syria, following the occupation of Cyprus. In this perspective, having Arab 'commandos' at their disposal, to be used mainly in Syria and Iraq, became important, both for organizing acts of sabotage and uprisings in the British rear and for establishing support points in the localities of the Arab countries. Arab "commandos" to be used mainly in Syria and Iraq became important, both to organize acts of sabotage and riots in the British rear and to establish support points in the locations of possible landings, and to provide the Mufti with his own organizational structure that would operate in conjunction with the SIM. Nor did this apply only to Middle Eastern Arabs: in early May, when the Military Center for the Preparation of Arabs was established, the first nucleus of the planned Arab Legion, another was also established for the preparation of Indians, and a third was planned for Italians already residing in Tunisia and therefore familiar with that country.. In parallel with this organizational activity, the SIM also began its intelligence and sabotage activities. However, we have almost no information about this. The only action that can be referred to is indirectly documented by the reasons given for three posthumous gold medals and the related brief biographical notes reported in a semi-official publication: parachuted in July 1942 near Aleppo, three soldiers (of Armenian origin and Italian citizens "by choice") set up an "information center" in the Armenian quarter of the city, which was soon discovered thanks to a tip-off. Captured, the three soldiers were subjected to "exhausting interrogations" and "inhuman torture" and, on September 26, shot. With a certain limited technical support, the SIM will ultimately facilitate the formation of irregular bands with elements attracted, in agreement with the Axis military commands, from enemy lines or other sources for use in special tasks; it will carry out all possible activities intended to carry out acts of sabotage against the enemy and will collaborate in thesend weapons and explosives to Arab countries. During this period, and in particular during the offensive in Egypt, propaganda activities were carried out not only by the Foreign Ministry itself, especially with regard to the development and formulation of its basic guidelines and its internal coordination and coordination with the Germans, by the Ministry of Popular Culture. In particular, it oversaw the distribution of printed material and provided news on the internal situation in various Middle Eastern countries and on British counter-propaganda. However, the bulk of propaganda activity was always the responsibility of the Foreign Ministry and, secondarily, the Ministry of Popular Culture, and rather than through the press, it took place over the airwaves, from Radio Bari, but also through three smaller stations: 'La Nazione Araba', 'Radio Egitto Indipendente' and 'Radio Giovane Tunisia', inspired respectively by the Mufti, Prince Mansur Daud, and the Destour

leader Habib Thammer. In a report sent by the consulate in Adana to Ciano in mid-March 1942 (which was directly linked to the previous one dated January 30), an explanation is given of the importance to be attributed at that time to radio propaganda, both in the event that it was adopted by Palazzo Chigi and in the event that it coincided with what it already thought, clearly explains the massive role that the "war of the waves" played in policy towards Arab countries in 1942-43. The report went into a whole series of specific issues and suggested the topics to be addressed and how to do so; here, however, what interests us most is what we might call the political-strategic starting point of the whole argument: Despite their aversion to England, with the exception of the Gailanist movement and a few sporadic attempts at rebellion in Palestine, it can be said that the Arabs have not, except verbally, and even then very quietly, taken any position against England, which, moreover, would be difficult for them and doomed to failure, given their lack of weapons and organization to resist numerous and heavily armed troops. Hoping for and encouraging rebellion at this time would be risky and unlikely to be effective. Even putting pressure on the nomadic tribes of the desert, which have always had such weight and importance in the affairs of the country, would today be not only difficult and extremely costly, but also practically useless. While waiting for events to unfold, thethe only thing that is possible and useful at this moment is, in addition to some contact with nationalist circles, to direct the Arab spirit towards the issues to which it is most sensitive, by means of intensified radio propaganda, which should at the same time seek to neutralize and thwart in advance any contrary action carried out by enemy propaganda. Of the 'events to come', the only one that at a certain moment seemed on the verge of materializingwas the conquest of Egypt in the spring and summer of 1942. Italian policy towards this country, both in the years prior to its intervention in the conflict and during the war, would merit an ad hoc study of its own, which is obviously not feasible here, although it is necessary to at least mention it, given that Egypt was to be the first concrete test of Arab policy tout court, and, equally importantly, of Germany's true intentions, i.e., how Berlin would behave towards its ally when put to the test. It was precisely during this period that Rome had to note with growing annoyance and concern the proliferation of facts and signs that led it to believe to believe that, as the moment when the Arab problem would transform from a hypothesis into a reality to be dealt with concretely seemed to draw nearer, there was a growing tendency on the German side to begin the actual settlement of the various aspects of the Arab dispute along lines very different from those on which, in words, such a settlement had hitherto been envisaged. So much so that, in private, some officials at the Wilhelmstrasse did not had any qualms about describing it as merely "theoretical," even when speaking with Italian colleagues. Reports were coming in from various quarters of German promises to the French to return Syria and Lebanon to them after the war, and there is reliable evidence that the Germans, led above all by Grobba, the true deus ex machina of Berlin's entire Middle East policy, were working to make it impossible for a unified Arab Middle Eastern state to be established in the future, so as to remove ITrak from the Mediterranean area of Italian influence and place it in the Persian Gulf area, which the Germans now considered reserved for themselves. Even with regard to Egypt, there were signs that were far from reassuring. Given this situation, in anticipation of an imminent conquest ofEgypt, Italian

attention focused essentially on two problems: that of determining, through a massive propaganda campaign, in which men such as the Mufti and the vice president of the Egyptian Green Shirts, Mustafa Wakil, were directly and indirectly involved, an attitude as favorable as possible to Italy (and, at the very least, revolutionary movements against the British) , and to prepare, at least in broad terms, the occupation regime that would have to govern the country until the end of the war. Of the two problems, the latter, entrusted essentially to the care of the head of the Egypt Office set up for the occasion at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Serafino Mazzolini, and candidate in pectore to head theItalian civil administration in Egypt, was politically the most important and delicate. In order to resolve it fully, it was necessary to balance at least three primary requirements: to establish a 'correct' but clear relationship with the Germans, who would present themselves as the true, if not sole, architects of victory and who would certainly demand a say in the name of military requirements arising from the need to make Egypt the base for the further continuation of operations beyond the Suez Canal; protecting Italy's existing interests in the area and establishing new ones; making Egypt and its relations with Italy as attractive and reassuring a "model" as possible in the eyes of all Arabs, in order to gain their sympathy and support everywhere, refute enemy propaganda, and, no less importantly, cut thethe Germans' ground and thwart their maneuvers in the Middle East. Two "notes," one dated June 24, 1942, and the other dated the following day, the first certainly and the second probably prepared by Mazzolini, shed some light on some of the basic lines along which it was thought to move to resolve this problem and show that full independence was now also planned for Egypt. It is not possible to say more. And not so much because Rommel's defeat at El Alamein cut short the, but because even before that, the development of general criteria for governing Egypt and the preparation of the relevant measures had been blocked at their first appearance by the attitude taken by the Germans. From the aforementioned note of June 25, it can be inferred that the Italian side considered there to be essentially two issues to be resolved with the Germans: that of the joint declaration that was to sanction respect for Egypt's sovereignty and ensure its full independence in the future, and that of the commander of the occupation troops (who would have 'supreme powers' in Egypt), whom Rome presumed (i.e. hoped) would be an Italian general and whom it wanted to be accompanied by a "political delegate" with the threefold task of "ensuring cooperation with the Egyptian government," directing civil affairs, and looking after the interests of the Italian community in the country. To resolve these issues and any others that might arise either at this preparatory stage or subsequently, Palazzo Chigi considered it appropriate to set up aspecial joint Italian-German commission. Berlin agreed to issue a declaration of respect for the sovereignty and independence of Egypt, which was in fact published in the text prepared by Rome on July 4 in the press. It did not take an official position on the question of the commander of the occupation troops, making it clear that it did not consider a decision on the matter to be urgent for the time being, but at the same time that, after the occupation of Egypt and before proceeding further, Rommel would need a period of preparation, during which Egypt would serve as the military base, thearsenal for future operations; which was equivalent to saying that Rommel should be the commander of the occupation troops. Finally, as for the joint commission, the proposal was dropped. The

Wilhelmstrasse saw the problem of Egypt essentially from two very specific perspectives: one of an immediate practical nature: "the spoils must go to those who took them", which, diplomatically, was translated for the Italians as "we will limit our supplies in the country to the immediate needs of our troops"; the other was political and focused not only on the present but also on the future: do nothing that could benefit only the Italians and instead maximize their image in the eyes of the Egyptians and Arabs in general (hence the propaganda aimed at Egyptians extolling the figure of "Rommel the liberator"), not to make any explicit commitments for the future, and to deal with individual problems on the basis of the balance of power between Germany and Italy. However, since it was not possible to completely ignore Italy's "rights," its requests, and its proposals, Rome had to be reassured: without prejudice to the needs of the Afrika Korps, Germany would leave Italy "priority" in Egypt in all fields, including the economic one. Ribbentrop did not intend to go beyond this "assurance," however. The directives he issued on August 16 (and of which the Italian government was not to be informed), even before the final decision was made to drop the Italian proposal to set up a joint commission, leave no doubt in this regard: For the time being, it will not be appropriate to send a civilian representative of the Reich government to Egypt. When the Political Delegate has taken up his duties in Egypt, Marshal Rommel will appoint von Neurath as the liaison between himself and the Political Delegate. However, von Neurath will at the same time remain the representative of the Foreign Ministry to Marshal Rommel. What has been said so far applies above all to the Wilhelmstrasse. For a more detailed picture ofGerman attitude, the discussion should be broadened to include not only a number of other German centers of power, both state and party, but also the various positions existing within the Foreign Ministry itself, starting with that of Grobba, who in many respects was the most hostile to Italy and the most committed to giving German Arab policy the greatest possible dynamism. Here, however, it is more important to try to focus on Hitler's attitude, both because, in the final analysis, he was the one who made the fundamental decisions and, at that time, his admiration for Mussolini and the suggestion of the 'Duce' still had a certain effect, and because some of the underlying reasons for his attitude towards the Egyptian problem help us to understand his more general attitude towards Arabs as a whole and Orientals in general, and therefore the German attitude and modus operandi in this field. Of particular interest to Egypt is one of the 'secret conversations' collected by M. Bormann, the one during the lunch on July 9, 1942. It shows that von Ribbentrop's directives of August 16 came directly from the Führer, but it also suggests that Hitler personally did not contest Italy's "rights" over Egypt, was opposed to Egypt's independenceEgypt itself and that he secretly hoped that Mussolini would prove himself in the future when the reasons of expediency that led the Axis at that moment to support Arab aspirations for full independence had disappeared, and that he would find a way to incorporate it into his empire: If we occupy Alexandria or Cairo, the Wilhelmstrasse should not venture to send a Resident to Egypt. In Rommel, we have a generalissimo who has covered himself in glory and is already considered one of the finest figures of this war. It would be absurd for the Foreign Ministry to presume to meddle in these matters. Moreover, I am of the opinion that Egypt belongs to the Italian sphere of influence. For us personally, the Egyptian sphinx has no particular appeal, but for the Empire it is of vital importance.

Sending a Resident could therefore set an unfortunate precedent and would authorize the Italians to send a Resident in turn, if the opportunity arose, to the Caucasus for example, when this region is particularly close to our hearts. It would therefore suffice for an envoy of General Rommel to be delegated to the Italian Resident in Egypt... As for the future structure of Egypt, it is clear that the Italians could not lose interest in that country. For them, the Suez Canal is of paramount importance, if only because of their possessions in East Africa. The Suez Canal cannot be secure for them unless they maintain garrisons in Egypt. If they want to remain there, politically and militarily, the Italians must avoid any inferiority complex. In this regard, they need only follow the example of the British. The latter, with several centuries of colonial experience behind them, know how to behave like masters. With them, the natives manage to forget that they are under a yoke. Furthermore, the Italians must be careful not to adopt the customs of the country in their entirety. In this, they should follow theexample of Rommel, who, throughout the entire campaign, never once rode a camel, limiting himself to traveling around the country in his panzer. Rommel knew full well that he would look petty on a camel, while he looked imposing in his panzer... Returning to the case of Egypt, I hope that the Italians, who have so far shown great skill in their relations with Muslims, will be able to keep their reputation intact. They should refrain from intervening in all the small details. As for the essential problems (irrigation, road construction), I am convinced that the Italian settlers, who are as industrious as bees, will work miracles under the Duce's leadership. If they had been able to stay in Ethiopia for ten years, these road builders would have made that country a model colony. This is all the easier in Egypt, as it is an almost entirely self-sufficient country. In fact, except for coal and iron, Egypt lacks nothing. Hitler could and did give instrumental support to the aspirations for independence of the Arabs, as well as those of the Indians, but he avoided making any public commitments that would bind him and probably thought that, in the event of a compromise peace with London, he could use his renunciation of support for them as a bargaining chip. Contrary not only to Mussolini but also to many German diplomats of the 'old school' and some of his collaborators who, at the beginning of the National Socialist movement, had passed through the Strasser left (such as Goebbels), Hitler personally had to view the national movements of these countries and those who gave them credit with great skepticism, not to say distrust. This was not a recent development, but had been the case since the beginning of his political career, driven by the strength of his conviction, which stemmed from his fanatical racism, his cult of strength, and his contempt for the national ambitions of "racially inferior" peoples.racially inferior." In Mein Kampf, there are statements on this subject that Hitler would probably have preferred not to have published at that time (so much so that they had already disappeared from the Arabic editions of his book several years earlier), but it is very difficult to imagine that he had renounced them or that they did not influence his political decisions and plans for the future: Already in 1920-21, when our young movement appeared on thethe political horizon and began to be hailed here and there as a movement for the liberation of the German people, many came to the party to try to establish a certain connection between it and the libertarian movements of other countries. This was in line with the plans of the "League of Oppressed Nations," for which many were campaigning: composed mainly of representatives ofcertain Balkan

states, Egypt, and India, who always struck me as loudmouths who put on airs without having anything to back them up. But quite a few Germans, especially in the nationalist camp, were dazzled by these pompous Easterners and believed that they had before them, in certain Egyptian or Indian students, the true "representatives" of Egypt or India, failing to realize that most of them were individuals without any following, unauthorized by anyone to conclude treaties with anyone. Therefore, the practical result of the relations established with such elements was nil, and the time spent negotiating with them was a complete waste. I have always been wary of such attempts, both because I had better things to do than waste weeks in such fruitless "talks," and because I believed that, even if they had been authorized representatives of those nations, the deal could not have brought us any benefit... I remember the childish and incomprehensible hopes that arose in national circles in 1920-21 when it was said that England was on the verge of collapse in India. Certain Asian charlatans or, if you will, authentic "champions of Indian freedom," who were then traveling around Europe, had managed to instill in otherwise reasonable men the fixed idea that theBritish Empire, whose pivot is India, was about to collapse in India itself. They did not realize that their desire was the father of these ideas, nor that their hopes were absurd. For when they expect the collapse of British rule in India to bring about the end of the British Empire and British power, they admit that India is of paramount importance to England... England will lose India only if it itself, in the mechanism of its administration, succumbs to racial decomposition (which is not now taking place in India) or if it is forced to lose India by the sword of a powerful enemy. Indian uprisings will never expel the British. We Germans have learned enough about how difficult it is to defeat England. I say this regardless of the fact that, as a German, I prefer to see India in British hands rather than in the hands of others. Equally pitiful are the hopes placed in the mythical revolt of Egypt. The "holy war" may give our German simpletons the pleasant illusion that others are willing to bleed for us. Almost always, to tell the truth, this cowardly speculation is the mother of such hopes. But in reality, the illusion would soon end under the drumfire of British machine-gun companies and the hail of bombs. It is impossible to attack a powerful state with a coalition of cripples, a state that is determined to shed the last drop of blood for its existence, if necessary. To me, a nationalist who appreciates the value of humanity on a racial basisappreciates the value of humanity, the recognition of the lesser value, from a racial point of view, of those 'oppressed nations' is enough to prevent me from chaining the destiny of my people to theirs. The difference between the German and Italian positions can be clearly seen in the attitude taken by Rome and Berlin towards the Mufti, el Gaylani, and other Arab leaders (about seventy in all, including a brother of el Gaylani, the son of the former regent Mahamed Serif, the former ministers of Defense, Naji Scevhat, and Education, Hassan Salman, General Ibrahim el Ravi and Colonel Fauzi el Khaugi, all Iraqis, Prince Nabil Mansur Daud and the president of Misr el Tayeb Nasser, both Egyptians, and the head of the Tunisian Destur Habib Thammer) who took refuge in Italy and Germany between 1941 and 1943. Of the two major leaders, the Mufti was rescued through a joint effort between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which sent Mellini Ponce de Leon from Ankara to Tehran, where the Mufti had taken refuge after the British occupation of Baghdad), the SIM and the minister in Tehran, Petrucci, on the eve of the Anglo-Soviet occupation. He was taken to

Turkey and from there to Rome, where he arrived on October 1, 1941. El Gaylani, on the other hand, was saved by the Germans and arrived in Berlin on November 21. Since, as we shall see, the Mufti took a more favorable attitude towards Italy and El Gaylani towards Germany, it cannot be ruled out that the choice of who to save was already based on a specific political logic. Apart from the weight of their respective previous contacts (and during the last few months the Germans had gained considerable influence over El Gaylani), choosing the Mufti was equivalent to focusing on a 'Greater Arab' solution; choosing El Gaylani, on the other hand, meant discarding this solution and tending towards one involving several Arab states and, in any case, with an Iraq not united with the Mediterranean Arab countries and, therefore, capable of being included in a zone of German influence, rather than Italian. In Rome, the Mufti, who had already had a series of talks with Mellini and had explained his point of view and his proposals on how cooperation between the Arab movement and the Axis could be achievedAxis and how the issues most directly affecting Italy could be resolved, was received by Mussolini on October 27. On the same day, the Italian press and Radio Bari reported his arrival in Italy. According to what Ambassador Buti reported to Pirelli, the Mufti was "fascinated" by Mussolini. From a note written a few days later by Palazzo Chigi based on what he himself reported after the audience, it appears that the Mufti insisted above all on certain points: "a clear agreement with the Axis powers to reach a treaty that guarantees the... complete independence [of the Arabs]"; the abolition of the "Jewish foyer in Palestine"; the union between Iraq, Syria, and Palestine and the possibility for the future state of "even closer ties with the already independent states," whose independence was to be respected by the Axis. The "Duce" for his part said he fully agreed: The Arabs can play an important role at this stage [of the war] and your arrival comes at just the right moment when we must unite our efforts with those of the Arabs... I am determined to issue the declaration for the independence of the Arab countries and I am ready to do so, but it will have more force if made officially on behalf of the Axis. I will discuss it with the Führer and we will do so. Encouraged by this, on November 1, the Mufti drafted a declaration which, to his great satisfaction, Palazzo Chigi approved with only a few insignificant changes. After submitting it to Mussolini, he sent it to Berlin on November 6, while the Mufti was traveling to the German capital to obtain approval from that government as well and thus ensure its rapid publication. It was at this point that the differences between the Italian and German positions began to become increasingly clear. As Meliini, who accompanied the Mufti, wrote to Buti on November 18, the German Foreign Ministry was above all "eager to find another more detailed one, drafted by Mellini on October 21, the same Directorate prepared one the next day for Mussolini (whoapproved) in which it advocated accepting the Mufti's requests to be received by him in order to establish a general agreement with Italy before going to Berlin, to announce his presence in Italy ("so that the gratitude of the Arab world may come to us") and to inform him that the Italian government was "in principle" agreed to establish a National Center for the Arab countries of the Middle East in Rome. From these and other documents of those days, it is clear that the Mufti intended to act in full collaboration with el Gaylani, whose arrival from Turkey was expected, and hoped that Italy would study a formula that would recognize the former prime minister as the "legal representative of the Iraqi people." For his part, the

Mufti, having resolved the sine qua non issue of the Axis' recognition of the full independence of the Arab countries of the 'Fertile Crescent' (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Transjordan), declared himself ready to work with el Gaylani and other Arab leaders to carry out "active propaganda" in the Arab world, foment revolts and sabotage, create a nucleus of an Arab Legion, and encourage resistance against the British and friendship towards theAxis in all Islamic countries (see Asmae, Political Affairs, Palestine, b. 32; Iraq, b. 18, 1941, phase 1). See "Oriente moderno," November 1941, pp. 551 ff. See A. Mrelli. Notebooks cit., pp. 314 ff.; as well as D. Carpi, The Mufti of Jerusalem cit., pp. 106 ff. Asmae, Political Affairs, Palestine, b. 32, reproduced in Appendix, Document no. 4. On November 4, on the eve of his departure for Berlin, the Mufti wanted to personally express his satisfaction to Mussolini by writing him a letter. Ibid., reproduced in R. De Felice, Fascism and the East, cit., pp. 289 ff. any excuse for not making commitments, let alone for unity, either with regard to the Arabs or with regard to others," and wanted to make it appear that the difficulties did not come from Germany. For him, the best solution "to give tangible expression to the Arab policy of the Axis powers" would have been the one he proposed on November 20 at Palazzo Chigi, namely to establish a Council of Arab leaders based in Rome and "a kind of office in Berlin." Faced with the Mufti's insistence and in order not to leave the field open to Italy, the Germans had no choice but to pretend to take his request seriously and approve the declaration prepared in Rome, especially since it was also supported by influential military figures, and to begin laborious negotiations with him, from which, however, they excluded the Italians on site as much as possible, and which lasted practically until the end of January 1942. First, with the obvious intention of waiting for the arrival of el Gaylani, considered more malleable than the Mufti, then, since the two found themselves in substantial agreementagreement to sow discord between them and win over the Iraqi to their own policy. In fact, for Berlin, the real problem was not how the declaration of independence should be drafted (so that the discussion of its text was merely a ploy to drag things out and raise issues that would put Italy in a bad light in the eyes of the Arabs), but rather not to reach any declaration at all, not to not to make any specific, let alone public, commitments on the independence or unity of the Arab countries, so as not to alarm the French in Vichy and the pro-Gaullists (in Syria and Lebanon) and Turkey (with the prospect of a future large Arab state on its southern border, which would inevitably have wanted to recover at least the sanjak of Alexandretta) and to retain the possibility of taking freely, at the appropriate moment, whatever decision it deemed most in line with its interests and the balance of power at that time. Even before el Gaylani's arrival, however, it became increasingly difficult to drag things out any longer, so that in the end Berlin was forced to agree with the Mufti on a declaration that largely mirrored the one he had agreed with Rome and in some points was even more in line with to his wishes: Amin el Husseini, Grand Mufti of Palestine and one of the leading figures in the Arab independence movement, had frank and cordial exchanges of views with the Duce and the Führer, resulting in the following declaration: the two Axis Powers will give the Arab countries currently suffering under British domination or occupation every possible assistance in their struggle for liberation; the Axis Powers, in response to the aspirations of the Arabs, are prepared to recognize the full sovereignty and complete independence of the Arab

countries of the Near East currently occupied or controlled by the British. Should these countries decide to unite, the Axis Powers will grant them their membership. The Axis PowersAxis Powers are equally prepared to give their consent to the abolition of the Jewish National Home in Palestine. Their intentions will be enshrined in the near future in a solemn pact that will seal the sincere friendship and close future collaboration of the Axis Powers with the Arabs. Negotiations for this pact will begin as soon as possible. During the talks, the intention of Italy and Germany to continue to fully respect the sovereignty and independence of all Arab countries that are currently sovereign and independent was also reaffirmed. The new text was immediately submitted to thethe intention of Italy and Germany to continue to fully respect the sovereignty and independence of all Arab countries that are currently sovereign and independent. The new text was immediately submitted to Mussolini, who approved it, but it remained practically a dead letter. On November 28, Hitler received the Mufti in the presence of von Ribbentrop and Grobba, and during a long conversation, although he did not go back on , he postponed the publication of the declaration to another time. Germany, he told him, was engaged in a deadly struggle against the two strongholds of Judaism: England and Soviet Russia. The Arabs were fighting the same struggle, and Germany would support them; but platonic promises were worthless and it was necessary to avoid anything that could weaken the military effort underway, and a declaration of support for Arab independence would have strengthened De Gaulleism in France. When the German armies pushed beyond the Caucasus, predictably the following year, and could point in the direction of Iran, the time would come to proceed with the declaration and, then, the Mufti would be the most qualified spokesman for the Arab world and would unleash the action prepared in silence. He understood perfectly well the Arabs' interest in an official declaration, but it was necessary to wait for the most opportune moment: he himself had waited five years to proceed with theAnschluss of his own homeland. And, at the Mufti's insistence that at least the declaration be signed, even if it were to be kept secret until the opportune moment, he replied that a document known to a certain number of people could not remain secret and would eventually be disclosed. More than a written declaration, moreover, what mattered was the promise he was now making to him. It is possible that with his drastic no, Hitler overruled and defeatedthe Wilhelmstrasse; however, it is much more likely that it was the latter that prompted his 'decisive' intervention in an attempt to put an end to the affair without upsetting the Arabs too much and at the same time presenting the Italians with the fait accompli of the Führer's realism. Indirect proof of this is the fact that, immediately after the meeting, the Germans began a series of maneuvers to divide the ambitious and politically more naive el Gaylani from the Mufti (the less willing of the two to accept such a total and sudden change of attitude), presenting the latter as 'too friendly towards Italy', insinuating that 'Italy would more or less commit itself to imposing him as head of state of the future Arab state', and trying to put him in the secondary position of religious leader, while el Gaylani was, on the one hand, promoted among Arab exiles in Berlin, Switzerland, and Istanbul as the true and only representative not only of Iraq (a position that, in early of December, von RibbenWhen asked by the Mufti if the statement could be made and kept secret, the Führer replied that it would be impossible to keep it secret. He then pointed out that he was not accustomed to

making such statements; that the only one he had made verbally to Finland had been kept and that the Arabs could trust his word. After that, the Mufti did not insist and concluded by saying that the words of the Fuehrer, like those of the Duce, were a great comfort and a great guarantee for him personally. The content of the conversation was reported to me by the Mufti and then confirmed point by point by Minister Grobba, who was present at the meeting. trop officially recognized him in writing) but also of the Arab countries in general and more especially of "little Syria" and, on the other hand, manipulated in an anti-Italian sense, insisting with him and with his fellow exiles on the concept that Iraq was not a Mediterranean country and that "no help could ever be received from Italy." And, finally, we must remember the attempts to delay the departure for Rome of the Mufti and el Gaylani's departure for Rome, or at least to convince them to stay in Italy (where they, and especially the Mufti, were sure that their requests would find a more receptive audience) for as little time as possible and to induce Palazzo Chigi to accept the establishment of a liaison body that would coordinate and unify thethe Axis' political and propaganda activities towards exiles and Arab countries, while Berlin, for its part, was taking a whole series of initiatives in this field without even informing Rome. Faced with this complex set of facts, the Italian side tried to take remedial action in two ways: by doing everything possible to avert a rift between the Mufti and el Gaylani and by taking advantage of the presence of the two in Rome (from February 6, 1942), to strengthen relations with them, showing themselves to be more understanding and helpful than the Germans and ready to intervene with Berlin to persuade it to accept their demands. In addition to the desire to put an end to Germany's ambiguous maneuvers (the full significance of which was now clear in terms of Berlin's future ambitions in the Middle East) and, for some, such as Ciano, probably also to take revenge, the hope of a new course in the war in North Africa and Egypt, rekindled by the second Italian-German counteroffensive in Libya, was also a factor in this sense were, at that moment, the hopes for a new course of the war in North Africa and Egypt, rekindled by the second Italian-German counteroffensive in Libya. These hopes inevitably led even a skeptical and cold man like Vittorio Emanuele III to attach great importance to the Arab card and, therefore, to a clear and possibly privileged relationship with el Gaylani and above all with the Mufti, since it was clear that if their demands were not accepted, that is, if they did not have guarantees for future Arab independence, they, and in particular the Mufti, would not be fully committed to the the Axis and, above all, it would have been difficult to obtain the support of the Arabs in the countries under British control. This was all the more so because the Allies did not fail to exploit the Axis's silenceon the future of the Arabs and to propose solutions and give assurances that, apart from the problem of the Jewish presence in Palestine, did not sound unwelcome to the ears of moderate Arabs. Before moving on to discuss the Italian countermeasures, however, it is worth pausing for a moment on a particular but not insignificant issue. While trying to maintain good relations with el Gaylani and to avert a rift between him and the Muftifti, which would have greatly weakened the value of the Arab card both in the present and in the future and at the same time played into the hands of the Germans, there is no doubt that the Italians had already made a choice between the two at this time: for Mussolini and Palazzo Chigi, the Mufti was now the preferred interlocutor. There is no doubt that a series of practical reasons contributed to

this choice, just as it is likely that a certain weight by certain men who had maintained relations with the Mufti in the past and who now managed, albeit in subordinate positions (but important from a technical and initiative point of view), the Arab policy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Equally important to bear in mind is the prestige that the Mufti enjoyed among Arabs as a religious leader and, compared to el Gaylani, also as a political leader, both because of his high-level personal connections and, above all, because his name was closely linked to the resistance and struggles of Arabs against Jews in Palestine. Finally, it was no secret in Rome that he was the real 'political head' of the two, although it was also known that, again between the two, he was the more intransigent and the least likely to be circumvented by resorting to more or less underhand tactics. That said, it is nevertheless our belief that Rome's choice fell on the Mufti also, and perhaps essentially, because of a political and personal assessment. A staunch pan-Arabistist with hints of pan-Islamism, the Mufti tended towards a unified solution to the Arab national problem or, at least, in the initial phase, towards a solution that would involve only a few Arab states, one of which, the one that most interested Mussolini, would have included Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, and Lebanon. An equally convinced and even fanatical anti-Zionist, he would have done anything to be able to present himself to his fellow believers, and the Palestinians in particular, as the man who had obtained from the Axis, and even better from the entire Tripartite, a commitment to the future elimination of the Jewish presence in Palestine. Officially, el Gaylani's position was the same, but Rome had to realize that what really mattered most to him was returning to power in Iraq and that, while he undoubtedly he favored a solution such as the "fertile crescent," he did not rule out aneastern alternative to it, which was the solution the Germans were aiming for and which would have taken Iraqi oil and any possibility of projection towards the Persian Gulf away from the Italian sphere of influence. This was both because of his personal ambition and because he was more attached than the Mufti to a less pan-Arabist and more nationalist conception of the Arab future, as it had been taking shape firstthe Ottoman Empire and then in the Middle East following the end of the First World War and the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. In short, compared to el Gaylani, the Mufti had the advantage for Mussolini and Palazzo Chigi of a fanatical intransigence which, on the one hand, made him less likely to fall prey to the Germans and, on the other, a more reliable ally because, in his own way, he was more idealistic, unwilling to compromise and, for this reason too, enjoyed greater prestige among the Arabs than el Gaylani. As mentioned, the Mufti and el Gaylani arrived in Rome from Berlin on February 6, 1942. Ciano received the latter and handed him a letter similar to the one von Ribbentrop had given him in early December, in which theformer prime minister was recognized as the head in pectore of the future Iraqi government, the Iraqi people were defined, for their resistance "to the criminal British aggression" of the previous year, as "worthy of complete independence and full sovereignty," and the Italian government said it was ready to start "as of now" "talks on the conditions of future collaboration" between the two countries. Eight days later, Ciano accompanied him to Mussolini at Palazzo Venezia. Significantly, the "Duce," while displaying lively cordiality, remained fairly vague with him, so much so that he appeared to be almost aligned with Hitler's positions: obviously, if anyone was to be credited with helping to push Italy to support, in contradictionwith

Germany, it was the Mufti, not el Gaylani; all the more so because, as soon as he received Ciano's letter of official recognition of his position as future Iraqi leader, he hastened to present him with two drafts, one for a treaty between the Axis and Iraq and the other for a protocol on the independence of Arab countries (already submitted to the Germans, who had left them unanswered), which Mussolini certainly had no intention of approving, the first because it referred to Iraq as an autonomous state entity, and the second because it was conceived in terms that effectively sanctioned el Gaylani's preeminence over the Mufti. With the Mufti, on the other hand, the "Duce" had no direct contact for the time being: during his second stay in Rome, he would only receive him on May 7, a few days before the Arab leader left for Berlin, which is also significant. Just a week after his arrival, however, the Mufti was received by the king, an honor that el Gaylani was not granted. The actual political negotiations, or rather the'Arab operation' were conducted by the Foreign Ministry, which adopted the tactic of maintaining close contact with the German Foreign Ministry, but taking the initiative on issues that were of most interest to it and extending the overall political discourse to the Japanese as well. Once they entered the war, the Japanese were in fact interested not only in having precise ideas about the future structure that the Axis wanted to give to the Arab world (and this was all the more true with regard to Germany, which they perceivedhad plans to interfere in Afghanistan and even India, in contrast to their own), but also to insert itself into its political action towards the Arabs, giving it an Islamic projection, so as to include the Muslim populations of India, thus making it an element of support for their military operations towards the West, and to link the discourse on Arab independence to that concerning Indian independence, in order to balance their respective needs and avoid provoking disparities and comparisons that could damage their image in the eyes of the Indians or involve them in taking positions and making commitments that did not correspond to their plans for the future. On the issue of, Tokyo's position on Indian independence was very similar to Berlin's position on Arab independence: it did not want to make any preliminary commitments. As Prime Minister Tojo would say to the Diet on February 16, Japan expected India to return "to its normal situation: India to the Indians", and would not hesitate to lend its support to "the patriotic efforts of the Indians"; it was therefore up to them to decide which side to choose and not to "forever lose the opportunity for a rebirth in accordance with their historical mission." The Germans, for their part, as soon as Japan entered the war, also considered the consequences that such intervention could have for their policy in Afghanistan and India. In Berlin, in the second half of December, they organized a series of meetings attended by representatives of the Wilhelmstrasse and the Supreme Command (among the issues discussed was the establishment of an Indian Legion), representatives of the Italian Foreign Ministry and the SIM, two Indian representatives, Subhas Chandra Bose and Iqbal Shedai, and theAfghan Gulam Siddq Khan, former foreign minister of King Amanullah. During these meetings, the discussion inevitably broadened to include policy towards the Arabs and the link between a possible declaration in favor of Indian independence. The Germans were initially opposed to this, citing the same arguments used by Hitler a month earlier with the Mufti, but the Indians, led by Iqbal Shedai (who was the Chigi Palace expert on Indian issues but who, as a Muslim, had also been dealing with Arab issues for years)had requested it with such

insistence (not hiding Indian concerns about what Japan's true intentions might be) that in the end Secretary of State Keppler, who chaired the proceedings, had to agree that the situation was radically different from that of June 1941, when von Ribbentrop had told Ciano in Venice that Hitler was opposed to 'any public declaration by the Axis regarding the future settlement of the Indies," and had undertaken to raise the issue again with the Führer. This clearly reopened the question of a declaration of independence for the Arab countries. All the more so since, after this series of meetings, the Mufti and Chandra Bose had, in January, established operational contact between them and met with the Japanese ambassador in Berlin, who in turn had expressed to Hitler his "personal" opinion that it was not appropriate to delay any longer in issuing a declaration by the three powers of the Tripartite Pact on theindependence of the Arab countries and India. This opinion was subsequently corrected by Tokyo, which said it was in favor of independence for the Arab countries in a text that was not substantially different from the one blocked by Hitler at the time, while for India it made it known that it considered a different text more appropriate, suggesting that it was thinking of a sort of conditional independence ("right to self-determination") rather than full independence ("freedom and independence"). This undoubtedly constituted an obstacle, but from the Italian point of view, which was essentially interested in the Arab aspect of the problem, it was not insurmountable and in a certain sense even welcome, because it fully included the Japanese in the discussion. Proof of this is the fact that in January, a first draft of a "German-Italian-Japanese declaration to the Arab countries" had been drawn up (we have not been able to establish on whose initiative), but it had not been followed up. At the same time as the Mufti and el Gaylani, Grobba also arrived in Rome, evidently to keep the situation under control. During numerous conversations lasting several days, the envoyhad to realize that, contrary to usual practice, the Italians not only had clear ideas about what they wanted, but were determined to get it. As far as el Gaylani was concerned, Rome wanted to make it clear that it could not accept him being granted any position of prominence. Formally, Italy wanted the principle to be affirmed that it was not appropriate to give the Mufti, like el Gaylaniani, or to make any commitments, even verbal ones, regarding the position that would be reserved for them in the future; there was time "to decide on this matter when the countries are liberated and the respective peoples can be consulted." In essence, however, the Mufti was placed in a superior position: we consider Prime Minister Gailani to be the true representative of the Iraqi people and a high-ranking figure who also has influence over other Arab countries and who, in the name of the aid always given byIraq to other Arab states, has the right to take an interest in their future. The position of the Grand Mufti is that of a great political leader, as well as a high-ranking representative of the Muslim religion, who, because of his past actions and his leadership of the secret Arab nationalist organization, has the right to take an interest in the fate of all Arab countries in the Near East, includingIraq. As for the requests made by the two, given their willingness to make commitments, "at the time and in the form to be agreed between Italy and Germany, regarding the independence of the known Arab states of the Near East and not to place obstacles in the way of the future union of those countries that so decide," the Italian side was in favor of proceeding "without further delay" along this path, resorting to the formula of an exchange of letters, possibly

even secret, with the Mufti and el Gaylani. The same formula was also to be adopted for the response to el Gaylani's request to conclude a treaty between the Axis and Iraq immediately. In this regard, however, the Italian position was even more cautious: once the principle of proceeding with the exchange of secret letters had been established, they would be drafted by Palazzo Chigi, which would then send them to Berlin for final approval. Faced with such an unusually firm Italian attitude, with the Japanese, after the occupation of Rangoon and especially S. Cripps, were pressing for a tripartite declaration on India and the Arab countries, proposing an extremely generic text that was not to Berlin's liking2, pressed by asmae, Political Affairs, Italy, b. 81,1942, phase. "Political Reports," notes dated February 15, 1942; Iraq, b. 18,1941, phase. 1, notes dated February 20, 1942. This second note, from which the quotations are taken, summarized the conversations held with the Germans first in Berlin and then in Rome and was conceived as a memorandum for a communication asking the Germans to approve and adopt the "broad outlines of the common policy towards the Arab countriesbi' drawn up by the Italian government. The text proposed by the Japanese and delivered on April 13, 1942, to Palazzo Chigi by Ambassador Horikiri was conceived as follows: 'One of the saddest attacks on modern civilization is undoubtedly the fact that India and Arabia, despite their glorious cultural traditions, are the object of ruthless exploitation byBritish imperialism and still continue to suffer under this oppressive yoke. This tragic circumstance cannot fail to arouse the profound opposition of Japan, Germany, and Italy, which are fighting for the establishment of a new world order with the sincere intention of allowing all races of the globe to find their proper place. Great Britain has maintained a vast empire through betrayal that is unparalleled and the astute policy of "Divide and rule," although the Indian and Arab peoples are, we hope, fully aware of the fact that Anglo-Saxon military power contributes to the maintenance of the Empire. Now, however, British military forces in East Asia are in complete collapse, while in Europe, British influence has been swept away by the valiant forces of Germany and Italy. Faced with this historic crisis, Great Britain is making every effort to mobilize the peoples and beautiful countries of India and Arabia in order to fight [word missing] the struggle to defend its Empire. How else can the situation be viewed if not as a critical period for India and Arabia? The maneuvers by Sir Stafford Cripps have only increased the gravity of this situation. The time is therefore ripe for the peoples ofIndia and Arabia to decide whether they should become [word missing] of Great Britain and serve the cause of an empire now in decline until its last day, or whether they should instead rise up, expel British imperialism, as their most bitter enemy, from India and Southeast Asia, and realize the ideals of "India for the Indians' and ' Arabia for the Arabs '. The British Empire being the common enemy of Japan, Germany, and Italy, the three powers are determined to fight until the empire is brought to its knees. Consequently, the three powers cannot afford to remain inactive at a time when India and Arabia are being transformed into strongholds for the defense of the declining British empire. However, Japan, Germany, and ItalyItaly have no ambition to replace Great Britain in either India or Arabia. What the three Powers actually desire is the immediate realization of "India for the Indians" and "Arabia for the Arabs" and the advent, as soon as possible, of the day when these peoples will once again, as free races, make their important contributions to the culture and civilization of the world. For this

reason, Japan, Germany, and Italy solemnly declare that they are willingly prepared to offer every possible assistance to the Indian and Arab peoples, should they desire assistance and help in their march forward to freedom" (asmae, Political Affairs, Italy, b. 84,1942). military, for whom what mattered was to be able to benefit, in Africa, but even more so in Russia and Yugoslavia, from the collaboration of the Muslim populations, and, probably also concerned about the reactions that a new refusal on its part might provoke in the Mufti and el Gaylani, the Wilhelmstrasse felt compelled to accept the Italian point of view. All the more so because a secret declaration on the independence of the Arab countries drafted in agreement with Rome would have put the Japanese in a position to adapt it to India as well, which was extremely unlikely, or, as happened, to abandon the idea of a joint public declaration, which would have prevented Berlin (and Rome too, albeit for different reasons) from being involved in a political act it did not want to carry out. Despite some prevarication on the German side, the first exchange of secret letters took place on March 31, with el Gaylani. In practice, the Iraqi leader was given nothing more than he had already obtained from von Ribbentrop and Ciano in the previous months: "full independence and complete sovereignty" for his country. As for the treaty between the Axis and Iraq, in the letter prepared by Palazzo Chigi and approved by the Germans, it was transformed into vaguely defined "special agreements" that were to establish the details of the collaboration to be implemented after the war, although it was not specified when these would be negotiated. To fully appreciate this attitude on the part of Palazzo Chigi, it should be borne in mind that Italy's opposition to the conclusion of a treaty or even just special agreements between the Axis and Iraq was not motivated solely by the desire to avoid increasing el Gaylani's personal prestige compared to that of the Mufti and other Iraqi exiles, and thus a strengthening of his position as an aspirant to the leadership of an autonomous Iraq or a unified Arab state extending over the entire "fertile crescent," but also by the fear that, if concrete negotiations were entered into, the Germans might obtain particular economic advantages from him to the detriment of the Italians. The second exchange of letters, with both Arab leaders on the independence of the Arab countries, took place only on April 28 and after more laborious negotiations. Until the end, the Germans were reluctant to accept it, even though they realized they could not avoid it and that it also had positive aspects, in particular that since the exchange of letters had to remain secret, the Japanese no longer had any interest in involving the Axis in a declaration concerning India, which obviously, could only have been secret as well. Officially, Berlin's reservations were motivated by the fear that the exchange of letters might end up leaking and provoking negative reactions from the French; however, what probably disturbed the Germans most was that it explicitly provided not only for the sovereignty and independence of the Arab countries, but also for "their union, if desired by the parties concerned," and was conceived in such terms as to enshrine for the first time in a document, albeit one intended to remain secret for the time being, with a third party the principle that Italy had a position of preeminence and initiative over Germany with regard to the Arab countries of the Middle East. The exchange consisted of two distinct groups of documents: a letter to Ciano from the two Arab leaders: Minister, in our conversations with you, we have expressed the confidence placed by the Arab people in the Axis Powers and their objectives, and we have outlined the national aspirations of the

Arab countries of the Near East, which are currently suffering under British oppression. We have also declared that the Arab people are ready to take part in the fight against our common enemies until final victory. We therefore appeal to the Italian government to declare its willingness to grant the Arab countries currently suffering under British oppression every possible assistance in their struggle for liberation; to recognize the sovereignty and independence of the Arab countries of the Near East currently suffering under British oppression; to allow their union, if desired by the parties concerned, as well as the abolition of the Jewish National Home It is understood that the text and content of this letter will remain absolutely secret until otherwise agreed. Please accept, Mr. Minister, the assurances of our highest consideration. Signed Amin al-Husseini RASCHIO EL GAILANI and two letters, separate but identical in text (except, of course, for personal references), from Ciano to the Mufti and to el Gaylani: Your Eminence [Mr. Prime Minister], in response to the letter you sent me together with His Excellency the Prime Minister Raschid Ali el Gailani [His Eminence Amin el Husseini, Grand Mufti of Palestine] and in confirmation of the conversations I had with you, I have thehonor to inform you of the following: The Italian Government fully appreciates the trust placed by the Arab people in the Axis Powers and their objectives, and their intention to take part in the fight against common enemies until final victory. It fully understands the national aspirations, as expressed by you, of the Arab countries of the Near East, which are currently suffering under British oppression. I therefore have thehonor to assure you, in full agreement with the German Government, that the independence and freedom of the Arab countries currently suffering under British oppression is also an objective of the Italian Government. Italy is therefore ready to grant the Arab countries of the Near East currently suffering under British oppression all possible aid in their struggle for liberation; to recognize their sovereignty and independence; to allow their union, if desired by the parties concerned, as well as to the abolition of the Jewish National Home in Palestine. It is understood that the text and content of this letter will remain absolutely secret until otherwise agreed by mutual consent. Please accept, Your Eminence [Mr. Prime Minister], the assurances of my highest consideration. _. Signed Ciano Two weeks later, in May, the Mufti and el Gaylani left for Berlin to proceed with the same exchange of letters on May 18 with von Ribbentrop. At first glance, one might think that, for once, Rome had managed to get the better of Berlin. In reality, a few weeks were enough to almost completely nullify, even beforeRommel's arrest at El Alamein dealt the decisive blow to hopes of being able to count on Arab nationalism to bring England to its knees, everything that had been done up to that point. In Berlin, in fact, instead of collaborating to implement joint political and military initiatives in support of the Axis, the Mufti and el Gaylani almost immediately embarked on a path of increasingly sharp contrast between them. Even asidethe more personal ones, there was certainly no shortage of reasons. The Mufti, as has been said, was a staunch pan-Arabist, with hints of pan-Islamism that had become more pronounced after Japan's entry into the war, when the 'liberation' of the Muslims of India and their 'reunionto the great Islamic body no longer seemed an impossible dream, and at the same time had become more religious in nature. This led to an accentuation of the differences that distinguished his position from that of el Gaylani, who was more of an Iraqi nationalist than a true pan-Arabist and even less of a pan-Islamist,

more secular and, in politics, more 'realist' than 'idealist', especially after the defeat suffered in 1941, which, deep down, he wrongly attributed (since Churchill, as we have seen, was determined to cut off the Iraqi boil and would not accept compromise solutions) to the intransigence of the Mufti and the military leaders devoted to him. These reasons for more or less latent conflict were once again exploited and deliberately played upon with greater determination and with disruptive effects, especially those among them who were at the forefront, such as Grobba, who considered the Arab card to be substantially more important in terms of the future (for their penetration into the Middle East) than in terms of the present (for its contribution to the war effort). Realizing the impossibility of winning over both the Mufti and el Gaylani to their policy, they decided to focus decisively on breaking the collaboration between the two two and on winning over el Gaylani to their cause, who in their eyes had at least three "merits": he operated from an essentially Iraqi perspective, he tended to be much more pro-German than pro-Italian, and he was weak in character, often unable to resist the pressures and intrigues surrounding him. By mid-June, things had already progressed so far that Ambassador Alfieri himself felt the need to send a cautious but lengthy and detailed confidential report to Rome in which, while attributing practically all responsibility to Grobba, he warned Ciano of the consequences that the conflict could have for Italian politics. Among other things, it reads: With regard to the presence in Berlin of the Grand Mufti of Palestine and His Excellency El Gailani, I would like to submit for your consideration some observations I have made in recent weeks. As you know, the German side has long since assigned Minister Plenipotentiary Grobba, who has lived for several years in the Middle and Far EastEast, lived for a long time in Turkey, and speaks Turkish perfectly and Arabic quite well. Grobba, who is naturally inclined to intrigue, has from the outset attempted to impose his personal influence on both the Mufti and President Gailani, and to "work" them in the direction he wanted. With the Mufti, who was more skilled, more sincere, and less attached to material advantages, Grobba's game had negative results. Gailani, on the other hand, certainly weaker in character, undoubtedly inferior in moral and spiritual equipment to the Grand Mufti, surrounded by people, some of whom (such as his brother) were not indifferent to the pleasures and practical joys of life, was unable sometimes able to oppose Grobba's pressures and intrigues with the resistance that might be necessary... I cannot specify at this moment on which individual issues Grobba's pressures and intrigues are being exercised, but it is certain that he is trying to bind Gailani with financial or military agreements, and that, above all, his work tends to attract to himself, by all means, the largest number of people surrounding the Iraqi Prime Minister. The subject of special attention in this regard is the brother of His Excellency Gailani, former Minister Plenipotentiary, a man who, as I said above, is far from practicing Tascetism and abstinence. I do not believe that Grobba has been able to achieve anything practical for the time being, partly because of the influence exerted on Gailani by the Mufti, who has repeatedly warned him against overly hasty agreements or understandings. Of the two Iraqi ministers accompanying His Excellency Gailani, one, Naji Chewkat, has clashed with Grobba to such an extent that he wishes to leave for Italy as soon as possible, unlike his colleague Hassan Salman. The reasons for theclash are not known to me, but it will not be difficult to ascertain them on the day of Chevkat's arrival in Rome. The other minister remains in

Berlin for now and, it seems, maintains a reserved position towards Grobba, which is, however, subject to change... Given the extreme difficulty of winning over the Mufti, he [Grobba] is now trying to create differences and friction between the two Arab figures in question, friction and differences such as to provoke, if not an open break, at least a split that could make fruitful collaboration very difficult or almost impossible. This lack of collaboration could, however, taken to its extreme consequences, one day make the creation of a single Iraqi-Syrian-Palestinian state very difficult. This would create a situation in the Near East in which there would be an Arab state formed by Syria, Palestine, and Transjordan on the Mediterranean, and another independent state, Iraq, on the Persian Gulf. This second Arab state, not considered part of the Mediterranean basin proper, could then, according to Grobba's probable political vision, fall within the sphere of German influence. And Iraq is undoubtedly the most interesting of the three Arab regions mentioned above, as it possesses the oil fields of Mosul and an outlet to the Indian Ocean.... In any case, I believe that although the situation should not be viewed as tragic, ... it would be wrong to minimize it, because we would run the risk of one day facing unexpected and harmful developments. If I may offer a subordinate opinion on the matter, it would be to try to bring the Mufti and Gailani back to Rome as soon as possible. However, it would be harmful if the Mufti were to return before than Gailani, because the latter, deprived of the influence that the Mufti exerts on him, could be led to compromise himself in a manner detrimental to our interests. However cautious Alfieri's language was, Ciano understood the gravity of the situation and on July 9 telegraphed him: Events in Egypt are currently giving particular prominence to the Arab question. Furthermore, it is more urgent than ever to begin the practical operation of the Arab Legion; in the absence of Arab leaders, given the autonomous and voluntary nature of theagreed to give the Legion, everything here is practically at a standstill. The Arabs we are gathering need a leader. For the above reasons, it is particularly urgent that the Grand Mufti, possibly with Gailani, be present in Rome. Regarding the delicate situation that has arisen between the two Arab leaders, for our part we must continue to show our desire to promote good relations between the two Arab leaders, as we have done so far. However,Ambassador Gabrielli is at the same time authorized to confidentially inform the Mufti that we are particularly keen for him to return to Rome because of the trust we place in him and given his prominent position in the Arab world and the opportunities for action that are currently available to him. On July 17, the Mufti and el Gaylani returned to Rome. However, the rift between them was now irreparable: essentially, each wanted to be recognized as the sole representative of the Arabs of the entire Middle East region from the Mediterranean to Iran, including Egypt. Two notes delivered by them on August 1 and 6 to Minister Vitetti leave no doubt. In the first, el Gaylani proposed as a solution that all matters concerning Iraq should depend on me in my capacity as president of the legal Iraqi council, which had thehonor of having officially declared war on England, fighting at the forefront of the Arab countries through his army and his government in defense of the country's honor and its threatened independence and for the realization of the independence of the Arab countries. Minister Gailani is considered a representative of the Arab cause. This is because, since its independence and especially after joining the League of Nations in 1932, Iraq has increasingly sought to achieve the independence of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and

Transjordan, being the first Arab country to gain independence and creating an international position for the Arab world within the League of Nations.It also suggested the establishment of a committee of Arab personalities residing in Italy, Germany, and Turkey, including the Mufti, to act as his advisory committee "for all matters concerning Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and Transjordan." The tone of the Mufti's note was quite different. Even though the official position of Palazzo Chigi was not to interfere in the conflict or take sides,other, and only wanted to end it in order to achieve their common goals in the best possible way, he knew full well that, if forced to choose, Rome would choose him. Hence his leverage, on the one hand, on what Ciano had confidentially told him through Gabrielli the month before to persuade him to return to Rome, and had repeated to him on his return, and, on the other hand, on his much greater influence on the Arab world.world, and, on yet another hand (this not written downwritten down, but in conversations he had in the days immediately before and after his surrender with Meliini and other ministry officials), on the coincidence of the goals of Arab nationalism, which he personified, with those of Italy, and on the dealings between Grobba and el Gaylani. In the days before, a similar plan had also been floated by Palazzo Chigi, but with a completely different intention, that of drowning, so to speak, the Mufti and above all el Gaylani in a body of no more than ten members, representing proportionallyIraq, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, and Lebanon, which was to become the only Arab body authorized to deal with the Axis and to "collaborate with unity of command and directives for the purpose of fighting against common enemies" (ASMAE, Political Affairs, Iraq, b. 18, phase. 1, notes for Ciano dated July 20, 194242). Ciano had received the Mufti on July 26 (see G. Ciano, Diary, p. 639). See ASMAE, Political Affairs, Italy, b. 85, 1942, phase. "Miscellanea," note by Mellini for Vitetti dated August 11, 1942. Concluding the note, Mellini wrote: whatever our action towards the Mufti and Gailani may have been or may be, dictated by contingent opportunities, we have always considered and continue to consider the Mufti's personality to be clearly and far superior in every respect to that of Gailani, especially for the purposes of our interest in future collaboration with Arab countries; it is to be considered rebus sic stantibus harmful to us and therefore to be hindered in in every way, with the appropriate caution dictated by our friendly and fraternal relations with Germany, the policy advocated by Minister Grobba for an artificial overvaluation of Gailani and for the enhancement of Iraq alone, a country that tends to be pro-German, to the detriment of the Mufti, who now tends to be pro-Italian, and of the other Arab countries in which the influence of the Mufti himself and of the Organization is either predominant (as in Palestine) or at least significant (as in all other Arab countries, including Egypt); it is not in our interest, in attempting to stem the Grobba-Gailani policy, to disillusion or irreparably disgust the Mufti, bearing in mind that he is devoted to the other most important Arab leaders in Europe, including Nadji Sciaukat and Taha el Hache, who are much more influential in Iraq than Gailani himself, as well as the emirs Scekib and Adii Arslan. Personally, I would like to express my absolute conviction that, following 30 years of British and French propaganda (and even today's more cautious German propaganda) against Italy, we have never had and do not foresee any other truly influential leader in the Arab countries of the Near Faced with the intolerable situation that had arisen in Berlin, which had also alienated Mr. Gailani and the two ministers of his cabinet, who, like him,

deserved to be recognized as meritorious in Iraq's struggle against England, I posed the clear question ofunity of command in my hands for the Arab activities in progress. I was waiting to settle this question in Berlin when Ambassador Gabrielli informed me of a telegram from Count Ciano from which I gathered that Italy recognized me as leader, acknowledged my great responsibility, and eagerly awaited me to work together. Meanwhile, in response to my request, Mr. von Ribbentrop informed me through Minister von Ettel that Germany was in favor of granting me sole command but considered it appropriate to first hear the opinion of Italy, to which Germany invariably defers in such matters, as is customary. That being the case, I asked Count Ciano that Italy, together with Germany, approve my recognition as leader of the Arab nationalist movement and that I have sole command, proposing to him a plan of action in Egypt in the interests of the Arab cause and the Axis, alongside the operating troops. Count Ciano replied that I would have this without fail. Faced with Mr. Gailani's obstinacy in denying the precedence he had hitherto recognized, any reconciliation seems impossible unless Mr. Gailani agrees to collaborate with me and enter intoin the interests of the common cause on the same basis and in his capacity as future president of the Iraqi council with the participation of the other two ministers who were part of his cabinet. I am not asking for honorary recognition or special commitments. I am only asking to be relieved of the responsibility I have assumed by encouraging Arab nationalists to fight against the oppressor and to die for the independence of their countries (for example, the struggle in Palestine alone alone has cost over 5,000 dead and 15,000 wounded), to be able to work in an atmosphere free from intrigue and personalism, and to be the spokesperson to the Axis for the aspirations, desires, and activities of the Arabs. But I cannot cover with my responsibility and that of thenationalist organization that follows me for the individual actions of Mr. Gailani if they have not first received my approval. Fascist Italy will appreciate the need for there to be only one person in command and assuming all responsibility on a ship in times of danger. This is not in form or appearance or for my person, things I do not care about, that one can say openly pro-Italian. One cannot take into account some secondary and paid journalist and some politician who, out of opportunism, has momentarily and secretly sought thefriendship of some of our consular representatives or the Armistice Commission. The Mufti, not as Grand Mufti, but as President of the Islamic Congress, as Head of the "Arab Nation" Organization, and as a man, is today an abstraction made up of King Farouk and Ibn Saud, the greatest and most influential Arab leader and one of the most influential leaders of Islam. It is my considered advice that, even without making any commitments, our policy in the Arab countries should be centered on him, whom the destiny and far-sighted policy of the Foreign Ministry since 1935 has made a true friend of Italy, first by coincidence of interests and now also by coincidence of views and sympathy and organization. All the more so in view of Germany's intrusive, technically prepared, and aggressive, albeit often misguided, policy in Arab countries and in view of the weak technical organization of our personnel with regard to those countries." But in substance and for the sake of substance: the future of the Arab peoples and the need for them to establish lasting and fruitful cooperation with the two Axis powers. From the outset, I took on the responsibility of convincing the Arabs to cooperate with the Axis. This is the project I have supported for

years and which has cost me effort, sacrifice, and responsibility. This makes me jealous of its success and continuity. I will be happy to accept any formula that Italy wishes to find and Germany wishes to approve that corresponds to achieving this substantial goal. Ministers Nagi Sciaukat and Hassan Salman and Emir Adii Arslan, who are with me, will also be happy to do so. in Istanbul, and others among my friends residing here who, like Mr. Gailani and myself, are currently refugees in Europe. I assure you that the correct tactic for friendly and lasting cooperation between the two Axis powers and the Arabs is serious cooperation limited exclusively to Arab organizations, which have great influence in Arab countries and have proven their power by raising the entire nationalist movement such as the two revolts in Palestine and Syria and the latest one in Iraq. They work only for the general interests of the Arabs and not for individual interests or personal ambitions. And in fact, Rome, if it sought to achieve a reconciliation between the two and in the course of the long and laborious negotiations carried out for this purpose, always repeated that it did not intend to impose any solution, but to help them find it among themselves. However, it held firm on one point: the position of the two "as had been recognized in the past' could not be changed without the acceptance of both. And it did not show any consideration for some of el Gaylani's advances regarding Arabistan and Kuwait, which were too obviously aimed at currying favor with it and, at the same time, to lay the groundwork for an expansion of Iraq into territories that Germany most likely had no intention of allowing it to annex. Hence el Gaylani's decision to return to Germany on August 28, leaving Palazzo Chigi in the conviction, as stated in a long summary of his relations with the Mufti from his arrival in Italy in October 1941 to May 24, 1943, that he had been influenced by elements hostile to us to find any excuse to leave Italy "dissatisfied" and to have Ubere's hands in Berlin. To further clarify his behavior, it should be added that at that moment, the German advance in Russia gave Gailani hope of entering with German troops through the Caucasus and thus establishing, with the support of Minister Grobba, who was closely linked to him, his supremacy not only in Iraq but in all the Arab countries of the Near . From the Italian point of view, the break with el Gaylani seemed to be more of a positive than a negative development at that particular moment, with the Axis forces stationed in front of el Alamein and the hope that Rommel would soon be able to go on the offensive againoffensive a positive development: with the direct confrontation between the two over, collaboration with the Mufti, who had remained in Italy, finally seemed to enter a phase of greater concreteness and adherence to the military needs of the moment. So much so that, as we have already seen, in the first half of September, when the Mufti agreed with General Amé to set up his own center for collaboration with the Axis powers in North Africa and expressed his intention to go to Africa himself "to carry out more effective political and military action in Egypt and the Arab countries," Palazzo Chigi seriously considered his request to obtain, if not the "sole command" of all Arab forces (which the Germans would certainly not have granted him), at least "recognition of his person and his authority as the leader of the nationalist movement of all Arab countries in the Near East, headed by the secret organization 'The Arab Nation' which he presides over." He considered an exchange of letters between the Mufti and the "Duce" and between Ciano, on behalf of Mussolini, and the Mufti with which to proceed with such recognition. The idea and the drafts of the relevant

letters were approved by Mussolini, and on September 13, the German embassy in Rome was informed. However, Berlin did not respond, and the matter remained in limbo until the reversal of the military situation in Egypt caused Rome to lose interest. In Rome, however, the Mufti was not only involved in the Collaboration Center and the organization of the Arab Legion. He was at the center of a dense network of contacts with numerous Arab and Muslim circles and personalities, which extended to other national groups and movements such as that ofChandra Bose's Iayan group, thanks to which he was sometimes able to obtain first-hand information that the SIM (and even the German secret services) were unable to obtain through their own channels, or obtained with delay and encountered greater difficulties in evaluating and correctly framing. His attention was already focused at this time, that is, before the Italian-German armies were driven out of Egypt and the Allied landing in French North Africa took place. he focused in particular on the situation in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia and on the repercussions that "the stalemate of Axis military action at El Alamein and Stalingrad' and on the developments that this would have had in the event of a possible Allied landing in those countries, making it the subject of numerous talks with SIM and Palazzo Chigi officials responsible for this sector. Nor would he desist from this action after the Allied landing in North Africa. Another sector to which the Mufti also devoted himself during this period (and even more so in 1943) was that of the Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Montenegro. On their behalf, he repeatedly asked Rome and Berlin to intervene with Pavelic "to facilitate a prompt agreement between him and the Croatian Muslims for the granting of the planned Statute of Croatian Muslims', to take military and political action against the Chetniks (and, as far as the Italians were concerned, to stop supplying them with weapons) in order to put an end to their violence against Muslims, and to authorize the formation of Muslim militias in Herzegovina and Montenegro 'for the defense of Muslim villages against the partisans and the Chetniks'. On December 5, 1942, the Mufti left for Berlin. The official purpose of the trip was to make direct contact with the German government to agree on action aimed at creating a "Maghreb liberation army" to be recruited from among prisoners of war and Algerian and Moroccan workers in Germany and France, and to plead the cause of Yugoslav Muslims. In Africa, the Axis forces were now being pressed from the east and west by the Allies, and there was no reason to believe that the situation would be reversed. It was not difficult to predict that, once the occupation of North Africa was complete, the Allies would strike their next blow on Italian soil. Despite his greater confidence in the Italians, even for the Mufti, Berlin was now essentially the only interlocutor. Nor can we underestimate the fact that in Iraq, Nuri el Said was now showing his desire to take advantage of the moment and the merits he had acquired with London (on January 15, 1943, Iraq would declare war on the Tripartite) to propose theidea of an Arab confederation comprising, in addition to Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, and Lebanon. This made the position of the Arab exiles who had made thethe Axis as their point of reference and maintaining unity among those for whom the essential point was the independence of these countries and at least the beginning of Arab unity and those for whom these reasons for their struggle were absolutely inseparable from that of the 'liberation' of Palestine from the Zionist presence. So, when he left for Berlin, the Mufti also had to set himself the task of preventing a possible split in the Arab nationalist

movement in exile and, to this end, seek reconciliation with el Gaylani, who, moreover, was urged upon him by many parties, primarily Shekib Arslan. Apart from authorization to visit some Muslim communities in Croatia and the German-occupied area of Yugoslavia in April and the possibility of holding a series of talks with el Gaylani that led to a purely formal reconciliation, the Mufti's stay in Berlin, which lasted until May 21, when he returned to Rome for a few weeks, did not produce any concrete results, except to push el Gaylani to show a cautious tendency to rapprochement with Italy. However, what is interesting for assessing the Italian attitude is what can be considered the last act of fascist Arab policy, which originated from the Mufti's trip to Germany and his "reconciliation" with el Gaylani. On April 20, 1943, from Berlin, the Mufti sent a note to the "Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Italian Government" in which, after recalling both Eden's two statements of May 9, 1941, and February 1943, regarding British British "sympathy" towards a possible union of Arab countries, and the positive repercussions that the second of these had had in Egypt and Iraq, and the plans to convene an inter-Arab congress to decide on the forms of the proposed union between Arab countries that were being discussed in those weeks, he stated that if the exchange of letters of the previous year onthe independence and unity of the Near East and the abolition of the "Jewish national state in Palestine" had been made public, as he and el Gaylani had unsuccessfully requested, it would "destroy all the maneuvers with which the Allies are trying to deceive the Arabs, who are 'intimately inclined towards the Axis', to draw them to their side'. Having made this statement, the Mufti concluded the note with anexplicit request that the Axis, at least now, publish an official statement based on Weizsäcker's letter of 1941, the secret letters of 1942, and the statement, also from 1942, on Egyptian independence: only in this way, he wrote, would the Arabs' concerns cease and the effects of enemy propaganda be nullified. Absurdly it may seem given the circumstances, Bastianini immediately took the request into consideration, strongly advocated it to the German embassy in Rome and, receiving no reply from Berlin, in May proposed that at least the Mufti and el Gaylani be authorized to publish the exchange of secret letters from thethe previous year and, in early July, while the Allies were about to land in Sicily, he had the text of the declaration drafted and sent to the Germans, asking for its prompt approval and publication: The Axis Powers, which have consistently expressed their friendship towards the Arab countries of the Near East and their understanding and sympathy for their aspirations, intend to formally reconfirm the guidelines of their policy. The Axis Powers therefore declare that they consider the freedom and independence of the Arab countries of the Near East (Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and Transjordan) as one of the objectives of their policy; that they are prepared to recognize the full sovereignty and independence of these countries and to allow their union, if this is desired by the peoples concerned; that they are opposed to any solution of the Palestinian question, including the project of a Jewish national home in Palestine, which is contrary to the aspirations and interests of the Arab people . It is obvious that the Mufti was extremely interested in obtaining the declaration from the Axis and publicizing it. Even though he now had little hope of an Allied defeat, he needed it for his own image, to justify to the 'Arab nation' for years of struggle against the British and the Jews and his choice to side with the Axis and in his anti-Zionist fanaticism to emerge from the whole affair as the winner even if defeated: even if the Arabs

had obtained independence and national unity from the Allies, they would never have obtained from them the end of the Jewish presence in Palestine; hence the historical justification of his struggle, and, indeed, his "victory" and, at the same time, his legacy to the "Arab nation." Significant in this regard is the speech he addressed "to the entire Muslim world" via Radio Bari on June 17, on the thirteenth anniversary of the British death sentence of a group of "Palestinian patriots," focused entirely on the irreconcilable conflict between Arabs and Jews and between Arabs and "any power that supports submission to Jewish influence" and on the awakening of the Arabs who, "whatever the circumstances," would ultimately lead them to victory in the struggle "against the Jews and their supporters." Much less obvious, and at first glance even incomprehensible, is why at that juncture a man like Bastianini, who was well aware of the dramatic situation in which Italy now found itself, who was already thinking about how to disengage it from Germany and get it out of the conflict and who, above all, had never been involved in Arab politics (except, many years earlier and very marginally, as head of the Fasci abroad), nor had he ever shared the enthusiasm of those fascists who considered the Arab card decisive for the present and for the future of Italy, he committed himself to a venture that was so devoid of any kind of prospects and which, even if it had ended positively, would only have irritated the British and increased anti-Italian animosity and hostility around the world. So much so that, during the Mufti's last stay in Rome, Vitetti had cautiously and unsuccessfully tried to obtain his consent to focus the entire declaration on the concepts of freedom, independence, sovereignty, and unity, that is, to drop the last point, the one concerning theJewish settlement in Palestine, the one that would have provoked the most negative reactions from the Allies. On closer inspection, the only explanation for Bastianini's behavior seems to lie in something that went far beyond his person, which was the result of fascism and Mussolini's personal convictions, but which, in reality, had much longer and deeper roots. It can be found in the umbilical cord umbilical cord that, for better or worse, connected the policy towards the Arab countries of fascism in thethe last decade and, let us not forget, from the period of its origins to a whole previous cultural tradition, especially Catholic, even if subsequently also accepted in secular terms by vast cultural, economic, political, and therefore also diplomatic sectors of liberal Italy, which saw Italy as a bridge between the West and the Mediterranean East and conceived in this perspective the essential and privileged relationship (regardless of its form) with the Arabs. In previous years, the weight of this tradition had certainly contributed to making Mussolini's Arab policy acceptable, without trauma and almost without resistance, and often with sincere enthusiasm. Now it made it possible for a 'good patriot' like Bastianini, who, like almost everyone else, did not even remotely perceive that the post-World War II reality would be profoundly different for the whole world from the one in which he had been educated and had lived, such as Bastianini, to think that, by working to launch in extremis the declaration requested by the Mufti and el Gaylani, he was acting in line with a tradition that came from afar and would go far, and therefore working for the future of Italy, laying a foundation for the post-war reconstruction of that bridge that fascism had tried in vain to build.Beyond this explanation, we do not believe that any others can be put forward. Certainly not that the whole affair went ahead solely through inertia, through bureaucratic routine, as that would be too

simplistic and would not fit in with the broader context of Bastianini's and the Foreign Ministry's behavior during those months. And, all things considered, not even the hypothesis that it was Mussolini who wanted to push ahead with the declaration at all costs declaration at all costs. Apart from the fact that no document supports such a hypothesis, there are various elements that can be brought against it, which are not decisive, but neither are they irrelevant. On the one hand, the precarious physical and psychological conditions in which the 'Duce' found himself at that time led him to deal essentially with allother kinds of problems, which were much more urgent or which, in any case, he considered more important at that time, leaving Bastianini considerable autonomy in foreign policy matters. On the other hand, the fact that in his public and private statements, both from that period and later, there is no mention of politics or the "Arab card," Arabian Peninsula, suggests that he now considered it worthless. This is all the more so given that there is no shortage of direct and indirect evidence that he had not given up on the idea that a decisive contribution to a "positive" solution to the conflict would come from the Indian uprising and the national movement led by Chandra Bose. However, this could not have happened for at least a year, in parallel with thethe Japanese advance in India, and would therefore have benefited only Japan and, if anything, Germany, but not Italy, which was now reduced to the limits of its capacity for resistance, unless Hitler had accepted his idea of stabilizing the Eastern Front defensively and, better still, reaching an agreement with Stalin and concentrating all his efforts in the Mediterranean. So, ultimately, it seems most likely to us that Mussolini either had no part in the whole affair part in the whole affair or, if he did, the decisive factor was represented by See Mussolini, XXXI, p. 196 (June 24, 1943) and XXXII, pp. 3 29 ff. (March 26, 1944). what we have defined as the "patriotism" of Bastianini and most of his collaborators at Palazzo Chigi. To this more general explanation, however, another more specifically political one can be added. As we have already mentioned and as we will see more clearly later, when he found himself in charge of Palazzo Chigi, Bastianini made an effort, partly sincerely and partly instrumentally (to lay the groundwork for attempting a general compromise peace or, if Berlin refused to give substance and credibility to the 'New Order', to have a 'valid' argument for leading a pronouncement by the minor allies against its policy and, if necessary, to sponsor their collective disengagement from Germany) to induce the Germans to counter the 'Atlantic Charter' with a 'Charter of the European Continent' setting out the Axis's plans for Europe after victory. In this context, it cannot be ruled out that Bastianini was thinking of linking his 'Charter' to a series of declarations concerning other peoples, primarily Arab-Muslims, so as to outline more completely the future international framework desired by the Tripartite, reassure non-European nationalist movements and keep them close, and at the same time strengthen Italian-Japanese solidarity, so as to secure Tokyo's support in persuading Hitler to accept the Italian point of view. Significant, as regards the Arab-Muslim aspect of this operation, is a document drawn up by the Center for Studies and Action for the New Order in the last days of April 1943 and sent to the Foreign Ministry at the beginning of the following month. It emphasized the opportunity to set up "a special commission for Arab-Muslim issues with the aim of incorporating issues relating to the lives of Arab and Islamic peoples into the New Order" and stated that the New Order, which the Tripartite powers intend to establish

from the Mediterranean to the Pacific, cannot ignore the Arab-Muslim bloc, which awaits the solution to its age-old problems from the new word that, first of all, the Ducein his famous speech to the Orientals in 1934... Our enemy made a fundamental mistake when, announcing the principles of the so-called Atlantic Charter, he stated that these principles do not apply to India and the colonial countries. We must exploit this mistake by the enemy to the full, because the New Order, whose principles were clearly set out in the historic communiqué issued after the 'four-day' meeting between Mussolini and Hitler, must necessarily include and address the national problems of 200 million Muslims who from the Balkans to Java constitute a bloc of civilization and energy naturally aligned with the Tripartite Powers. After this long digression, which was necessary, however, to clarify Mussolini's political and strategic perspective and the importance that the 'Duce' attributed to the Middle East, we inevitably return to thequestion of why Mussolini, who, after the conclusion of the armistice with France, considered Cyrenaica to be the only land border "on which to act," continuously spoke with his collaborators about the need to attack the British in Egypt as soon as possible, urged Badoglio and Oraziani to do so, and seemed deeply irritated (even talking about replacing the latter if he continued to postpone the offensive) by the technical difficulties they cited to delay the attack, yet he took no real military initiative between June and October 1940. One One explanation that has had some success, as mentioned above, is that Mussolini's passivity was the result of the paralyzing influence on him of the multitude of plans he wanted to carry out and his fear of suffering a defeat in Egypt similar to the one he had suffered in the Western Alps. Hence his orders for Oraziani to go on the offensive when the Germans began their landing operations in England, orders which he modified, as we have already said, only at the end of August, when the landing began to seem less and less likely for that year, and especially between the end of September and the middle of the following month of October, when he first had the certainty of its postponement and then decided to attack Greece. As we have already anticipated, this answer is likely to contain some validity; however, it is impossible to accept it sic et simpliciter. The same can be said for the answer, which has also had a certain amount of success (in different and contrasting ways), according to which Mussolini was eventually persuaded by his military leaders who, whether due to incorrect information about the strength of enemy forces in the Mediterranean, fear of a new and more serious defeat, or lack of preparation to face a modern war in the desert, tended to subordinate the offensive to a series of optimal preconditions that the passage of time made increasingly unachievable, while timely and decisive action, as Balbo had apparently intended, could have taken advantagethe serious difficulties in which the British found themselves due toItaly's entry into the war and the capitulation of France. It cannot be ruled out that Mussolini feared defeat, and that his fears were compounded by the concerns and ongoing difficulties presented to him by the military leadership and the poor functioning of the military intelligence services, for whom the picture of the enemy forces was very different from the reality. Had this been better known (Liddell Hart spoke of 'numerical superiority' of Italian forces), should have encouraged rather than discouraged a decisive offensive both in North Africa and against Malta. This was what the British feared and expected, as did everyone else, starting with the Germans. Official British documents and memoirs leave no

doubt about this. At the end of June, the British Admiralty seriously considered abandoning the eastern Mediterranean and concentrating (via the Cape route) the fleet at Gibraltar (and, if Spain had entered the war, to transfer it to the Atlantic): it was only Churchill's strong opposition that led to the idea being shelved and a decision to resist to the bitter end. I opposed this policy, wrote Churchill, which, although justified in theory by Italian naval power, did not, in my opinion, correspond to the real values of the fighting forces, and, moreover, seemed to seal Malta's fate. Even in August and September, the British expected an Italian advance into Egypt "with great force" and, not knowing whether they would have time to prepare the necessary countermeasures, did not rule out the possibility that it could push as far as the Nile delta, where the decisive battle would be fought. Churchill also considered Malta to be in "extreme danger," "at the mercy of any landing force." At first, when the war seemed likely to end within a few months, the concerns and arguments of Badoglio and Oraziani must have had some effect on Mussolini: despite his growing contempt and impatience with the military leadership for their lack of a strategic course of action, for the conflicts, jealousies, and tendency to pass the buck and protect their "independence" that characterized the relations between the three branches of the military and between them and the Supreme Command, the "Duce," partly because of a residual sense of psychological inferiority in the face of the "generals' and their technical arguments, and largely because he did not consider it politically expedient at that moment to engage in a show of force with the military, most likely leading him to listen to them even more than he would have liked. The diaries of Ciano, Bottai, and Armellini, three sources that are above suspicion in this regard given the different positions of their authors, make this clear and suggest that he was already thinking of personally assuming supreme command in the near future after the war ended, but that for the moment he preferred to avoid controversy. However, examination of the available documentation raises doubts that either of these answers is sufficient to truly explain Mussolini's behavior. First of all, it is important to clarify the multiplicity of intentions that Mussolini wanted to achieve. If by intentions we mean some of his most deeply rooted and long-standing feelings, such as hostility towards Greece, or those connected, on the one hand, to how he had had to deal with the French armistice and, on the other, to the risk that Germany and England might negotiate a settlement of the conflict which, at that moment, would inevitably have been achieved over his head and to the detriment of what he considered to be Italy's war aims; or if we refer to thethe accentuation, in this situation, of his natural tendency not to give up any opportunity to try to turn any occasion that arose to his advantage (typical in this regard is the attention he paid to Yugoslav internal politics and the possibility of an upheaval that would allow him to intervene in that country); if this is what is meant by intentions, there is no doubt that Mussolini cultivated several such intentions between June and October 1940, and not only in his heart of hearts, as we have seen him share them on several occasions with the Supreme Command, giving Badoglio general operational instructions (gradually modified as the political situation changed) concerning possible interventions against Yugoslavia, Greece, and France. However, if by "intentions" we mean something more precise and concrete, the picture changes and we must recognize that the logic behind the instructions given to Badoglio did not stem from a real political-strategic choice, but essentially from the

desire not to rule out any possibility, to be able to take any initiative that circumstances offered or imposed on him, and all this while trying, for the time being, to avoid taking any truly binding steps. Three months after entering the war, Mussolini had not only failed to take any political-strategic decisions, apart from the one (obvious in one sense, but still largely theoretical in another) concerning the priority of the Cyrenaican front over any other possible front, but he had not even had any other concrete operational plans studied, which only happened on September 12, when the prospect of an imminent end to the conflict became more pressing and with it the concern about the German attitude, which was formally unexceptionable but in fact increasingly worrying. It was on that date that Badoglio instructedthe Army, Navy, and Air Force to prepare "as soon as possible" operational plans for possible operations against Yugoslavia, Greece, and France. These plans were no longer mere hypotheses, as in previous months, but responded to a more precise orientation "based on the situation as it can be foreseen today" and took into account their compatibility with the "scarce forces" available. Thus, in the first part of his instructions, Badoglio outlined the general terms of the problems to be addressed: With my subsequent papers, I have transmitted the Duce's orders regarding regarding possible operations to be carried out against Yugoslavia, Greece, and France (in the Rhone Valley, Corsica, and Tunisia). It is clear that, with the limited forces at our disposal, all these operations, especially if they were to be carried out simultaneously, are not feasible. The orders given so far were therefore intended to guide the General Staff of the Armed ForcesAA. towards the various scenarios that may arise depending on the uncertain and changing political and international situation. It is now necessary to begin studies for a more precise orientation based on the situation as it can be foreseen today. Operations against Yugoslavia ("Emergency E"). The Duce considers the political situation in Yugoslavia to be such that a short-term upheaval can be predicted. Therefore, by the end of October, the deployment must be completed so as to be able to take advantage of any internal upheaval. aussma, Greece, 1-4, b. 11, phase. 3. Operations against Greece ("Emergency G"). He must consider the possibility of our armed intervention to occupy Chiamuria, in Epirus, and possibly the island of Corfu and, in a second phase, the islands of S. Maura, Kefalonia, and Zakynthos. General lines of the operation: those provided for in "Emergency G" of the Directives for operations in Albania, issued by the Army Ministry with no. 2100 of prot. The transport by sea of the reinforcements needed for the troops in Albania must be completed by the end of September. Operations against France. Occupation of the Rhone Valley. The occupation is to be considered suspended. Occupation of Corsica. It will be carried out, if ordered, with troops from Sardinia. The operation must be prepared in the strictest secrecy, but in such a way as to be able to act quickly once the order is given. Occupation of Tunisia. It may be carried out with the 5th Army. The completion of this large unit will begin after the end of September, when the movements to Albania will be completed. In addition to the completion of the Army, its reinforcement must be studied by sending one or more divisions depending on the circumstances and considering the possibility that these divisions will be landed in Tunisia. Having clarified this first aspect of the question, we can now take a closer look at Mussolini's stance on operations on the Cyrenaican front. On July 3, Badoglio sent Oraziani an apparently explicit order from Mussolini: "It is in Italy's vital

interest that you be ready to launch an offensive on the 15th." Oraziani replied by assuring him that on the 15th he would begin "movement across the border with the occupation of Sollum." Rome hastened to inform him that the date was only "indicative" and that he should begin the offensive when he deemed it appropriate and that, therefore, he was authorized to delay the "well-known operation" until he had "all the means" at his disposal to carry out "a wide-ranging and in-depth maneuver in order to achieve results of considerable importance," which, according to Badoglio, would presumably be until August 3-4. At this point, however, it was Graziarli who requested and obtained ("you are completely free to act in the manner and at the time of your choosing," Badoglio telegraphed him on July 20) a further postponement, both in consideration of the hot season and because he planned to focus, "at least initially," on Marsa Matruh and subsequently on Alexandria.1 Up to this point, one might think of Mussolini being held back in his offensive plans by Badoglio and Oraziani. However, this image does not fit with the telegram of instructions sent by the "Duce" to Oraziani on August 19 to inform him of his decision to combine the offensive in North Africa with the start of German landing operations in England. In fact, the offensive is describedin such vague and, all in all, contradictory terms that it suggests that, ultimately, Mussolini saw it not so much as a real offensive but rather as a taste of the enemy forces, a way of engaging them so that he could then adjust his plans according to the situation that would arise. Furthermore, knowing his predisposition to refer to the "experience of history', it is likely that, given the coincidence with the German landing in England, rather than the situation on the ground, he was thinking of the possibility that the British forces in Egypt would be seized by a crisis of discouragement and self-dissolution: The invasion of Great Britain has been decided, preparations are being finalized, and it will happen. As for the timing, it could be in a week or a month. Well, on the day the first platoon of German soldiers touches English soil, you will attack simultaneously. Once again, I repeat that I am not setting territorial objectives: it is not a question of targeting Alexandria or even Sollum. I am only asking you to attack the British forces in front of you. I take full personal responsibility for this decision. You had planned to attack on July 15, as soon as the tanks arrived. It was very wise, also from a climatic point of view, to postpone until a better time. In the meantime, making an effort that no one better than you can appreciate, we have sent you everything we could. You have asuperiority in terms of manpower, equipment, and morale. Five battleships are ready. We can concentrate more aircraft. After twelve months of waiting and preparation, it is time to attack the forces defending Egypt. I have no doubt about the final outcome of the battle. Once the enemy has been defeated, the extent of its defeat will give us the norm for further action. Marshal Oraziani, as I already told you in our last conversation, time is working against us. The loss of Egypt will be the coup de grâce for Great Britain, while this rich country, which is necessary for our communications with Ethiopia, is the great prize that Italy awaits and which I am sure you will give it. Reply by telegram confirming or denying. Ten days later, Mussolini, as mentioned, "considering the delay in the German attack on England," communicated to Badoglio "his decision to have Marshal Oraziani begin the attack even if the German attack does not take place.". As the Chief of Staff in turn communicated to Oraziani, transmitting the order and inviting him to be ready for September 8, the Duce's

decision was dictated by the fear that "if an agreement is reached between the Germans and the British, we will be left out of any discussion if we do not at least fight against the British." In the absence of other elements and since the documentation relating to these first months of Italian participation in the conflict has some gaps, it is from this statement by Badoglio that we must start in order to arrive at a less stifling explanation than those given so far for Mussolini's passivity. This is all the more so since, although the "Duce" did not want to consider proposals for postponement this time (Oraziani would have liked to wait a few more months before going on the offensive and obtain additional resources, so as to aim for the occupation of Marsa Matruh and then march on Alexandria), he nevertheless seemed satisfied for the moment with an action limited in time (from September 9 to 15) and in space (up to Sidi el Barrani). More importantly, while asking Oraziani to resume the initiative around October 10-15 and conquer Marsa Matruh, thus transforming the success achieved so far from tactical to strategic and, even more so, political, he rejected the German offer of two armored divisions, whose contribution could have been decisive, on the grounds that it would take too long to make them operational: German aid, if anything, would be requested for the third phase of the operation, the attack on the Delta, and, in any case, not in the form of organic units, but of trucks and tanks to be used by Italian troops and specialized units, anti-aircraft and air formations (Stukas and fighters) with their crews, since it was unthinkable that the Germans would be willing to entrust their aircraft to others. Nor,, according to the directives he sent to Badoglio and Graziani on October 5, he took it for granted at that time that the advance would continue beyond Marsa Matruh: once Marsa Matruh had been reached, the last of the nine points summarizing these directives stated that we would see which of the two pillars of the British Mediterranean defense would have to be knocked down: the Egyptianor the Greek. Finally, it is significant that his irritation at Graziani's resistance to moving against Marsa Matruh before December-January was initially motivated by general strategic and psychological considerations related more to the situation developing in Greece than to the specific situation in North Africa (so much so that on October 18, he ended up granting Graziani "all the time necessary for proper preparation'), and a few days later, on October 26, when he reversed his decision, not because he had reconsidered the situation in North Africa, but because he feared that everything was about to collapse, namely that Berlin was concluding peace with France and that, with the possibility of a German landing in England before winter now gone, this could pave the way for direct negotiations between Berlin and London, in which Rome's role would be reduced to a minimum. The closing words of the personal letter that Mussolini wrote on October 26 to Graziani to persuade him to march or give up command of the forces in North Africa (even on November 1, in the euphoria aroused in him by the very first assessments of the progress of the attack on Greece provided to him by the local air force command, would have turned into yet another authorization to "finalize preparations for the operation on Marsa Matruh") is already indicative in this regard: I repeat that at the peace table we will take home what we have conquered militarily. It was not worth having 16 months to prepare, to obtain everything you asked for, to have 15 divisions, to take home Sidi el Barrani. However, the available sources offer many other elements, thanks to which it is possible to provide a more complete explanation not only of Mussolini's attitude

towards the operations in Cyrenaica between June and October 1940 and his sudden decision to attack Greece (after having refused to listen to Ciano's insistence in this regard until shortly before, and nothing new had happened in the meantime in relations with Athens that could have changed his previous decision), but also, more generally, of his overall political strategy during those four months. Those were the very months of the war during which every military decision was certainly more influenced by political considerations, to the point that it is no exaggeration to say that these months Mussolini essentially made no military decisions, or only made them in appearance, and that the reasons for this were purely political. In Mussolini's view, as has been said, the June 1 military takeover was supposed to be almost platonic. The "decisive weight' of Italy's intervention should have led France and England to seek a negotiated solution to the conflict, even through a sort of 'mediation' by the 'Duce', because he was the only statesman capable of exerting a moderating influence on Hitler and was interested in not allowing the Germans to win too decisively. From this perspective, it is natural that, regardless of other considerations and primarily Mussolini's concerns about the aftermath, Italy's military commitment could only be modest, i.e., such that it would not render his role as a belligerent incompatible with the role of mediator he hoped to assume. This explains the 'defensive stance' on all fronts that he ordered at the time of entering the war and modified with the order to go on the offensive in the Alps only when the French situation had deteriorated to the point where it was impossible and politically counterproductive to remain on the defensive, but confirmed in fact for the other fronts, so much so that the decision to study 'anoffensive from Cyrenaica towards Alexandria" and to engage the Air Force to "sterilize" Malta and "take action" on Gibraltar and Alexandria was only taken by him a week later, once the armistice with France had come into force and, even more significantly, on Badoglio's proposal. But it also explains many other things, including how, in the final stages of the war and especially after its its conclusion, the legend arose and spread that Italy's intervention had been secretly agreed upon, if not actually requested, by France and England, who were now resigned to defeat and interested in not finding themselves facing only Hitler at the peace table. And, for what interests us most here, it explains the reasons for Mussolini's otherwise inexplicable military passivity until October. The unexpected speed of the French collapse and the armistice events that followed, while arousing disappointment and concern in Mussolini, did not substantially alter his overall view of the situation, on the basis of which he had entered the war, and reinforced his conviction that it would be over in a few months at most: beforewinter, even England would have to lay down its arms. The only uncertainty was how: whether forced by German military action or as a result of the prevalence of tendencies willing to come to terms. Theoretically, Mussolini still had to hope that he could play a special role in the negotiations, especially since, unlike what had happened in the armistices with France, it would be more difficult for the Germans to use their point of view with practical military considerations. In fact, the arguments used in June by Hitler and Ribbentrop could have been turned against them (citing the need to prevent the Dominions from following theexample of the mother country) to induce them to moderate any excessive demands or those contrary to Italian interests. But Mussolini also realized that arriving at the peace

table without having made any concrete contribution to the German victory would have placed him in a position of inferiority, would have made the full realization of his objectives almost certainly impossible, and would also have diminished his possible arbitral weight. So, all things considered, his preferences realistically ended up going to the first solution, that of peace imposed on the battlefield, which gave him more time to try to arrive at the negotiating table in a less unfavorable position. This was all the more so because the time factor, at that moment, did not appear to be a problem he needed to worry too much about. On the domestic front, until the end of 1941, both the Ministry of Trade and Currency and the bodies responsible for production did not foresee any significant shortages in stocks, and as for the concerns of the Ministry of Finance, there was always the possibility of meeting them by resorting, as the Germans did, especially during periods of operational stagnation, by making appropriate reductions in the mobilized workforce (which had proved to be excessive in some respects), placing most of the non-commissioned officers and older soldiers on leave, as well as a significant proportion of younger ones. This measure would also would also have benefited the economy and the popularity of the regime. Nor would a prolongation of the conflict for a few more months, at the latest until the spring-summer of 1941, when the Germans would either land in England or bring it to its knees with aerial bombardments and submarine warfare, have had negative consequences on the general strategic level. Contrary to what is often claimed, Mussolini did notoverestimated, as Hitler did, the impact that American intervention would have on the outcome of the conflict and was convinced that Roosevelt ("the individual towards whom the Duce now directs most of his hostility," as Ciano wrote in May 1941) wanted it with all the force of his "fanaticism." However, he also thought that if Roosevelt had not come to the aid of the democracies in May-June, when France was still a valuable bridgehead on the continent, he would be even less likely to do so now. A prerequisite for any intervention was that Roosevelt be re-elected president (in November) and that he would be able to overcome the very strong isolationist and neutralist tendencies in the United States. This was a possibility that Mussolini did not rule out entirely, but which he considered rather doubtful, both because, in his opinion, the Americans would have preferred to enrich themselves from the war rather than fight it themselves, and because of the threat posed by Japan, especially after it had decided to join the Tripartite Pact. In any case, he believed that this would not happen immediately after Roosevelt's possible re-election, but only at a later date. This is evidenced by what he wrote to Hitler on August 24: United States. Unless there is a sudden about-face, which is always possible in a country of genuine hysterics such as American politicians, the possibility of American intervention must be calculated as a reality of tomorrow, especially if, as seems likely, Roosevelt is re-elected. Roosevelt will not contribute men, but he will provide more extensive aid in terms of resources, especially aircraft. This is already happening today, so even this possibility prevent the defeat of Great Britain. If we add to this the fact that, according to the SIM, at least a year would have passed between the moment of intervention and the moment when the United States could have effectively made its weight felt in the conflict, or even more, according to the Germans, perhaps as late as mid-1942, it is easy to understand why, at that moment, American intervention appeared to Mussolini to bepossibility that a victorious conclusion to the

conflict would be premature and confined to the realm of hypotheses dear to "defeatists" and "armchair strategists." Nor did the "Duce" consider the possibility of a rapid extension of the conflict to the east. In fact, while he was certain that a deadly clash between theAxis and the USSR, he did not believe it would happen before the second half of the decade. For the time being, neither Berlin nor Moscow was in a position to consider it: the former was too weak militarily and too interested in being well paid for its 'benevolent' neutrality (the Germans had not informed Rome of the secret agreement signed with the Soviets alongside the political one in August 1939, but Mussolini could not fail to realize that the annexations that the USSR was gradually proceeding with must have been agreed in some way with Germany beforehand); the latter, in turn, could not wage war on two fronts and had to settle the score with England first. Despite its anti-Bolshevism, which in the months of 'non-belligerence' had contributed significantly to creating a fundamental disharmony in the attitude of Rome and Berlin towards the USSR and serious tension in relations between Rome and Moscow, once the decision to intervene had been taken, Mussolini immediately moved realistically towards normalizing and developing these relations with the dual purpose of increasing economic relations (which the Soviets made conditional on political relations) and to try to counterbalance to some extent the hegemony that the Germans tended to establish over the Danube-Balkan region, inserting himself directly into the relationship between them and the Soviets. In this context, the first signs in July and August of a change in the German attitude towards the USSR did not attract the attention they deserved in Rome, and Berlin's increasingly clear hostility (which had initially encouraged and approved it) to an improvement in Italian-Soviet relations was attributed essentially to the Germans' distrust of any Italian initiative that had not been agreed in detail with them. Thus, even after the negative outcome of Molotov's trip to Berlin in November (of which, as usual, it was only partially informed), Rome continued, on the one hand, to seek an agreement with Moscow, showing itself willing, in order to be able to proceed with economic agreements, to make political concessions in principle (especially on the issue of the straits) that Berlin did not agree with at all and, on the other hand, to consider the Tripartite Pact essentially aimed, for the Axis, at "easing" Russian-Japanese relations and "straining" those between the United States and Japan to the maximum, an interpretation that Berlin increasingly disagreed with. Mussolini's attitude must be viewed in this general perspective, not only in the aftermath of France's capitulation, but also in the months immediately following. In particular, on the one hand, he was much more interested in the political aspects of the war than in the strictly military ones, especially in the attitude of the Germans (towards France, the Balkans, and Switzerland), striving to penetrate their real intentions for the postwar period and to counter them where they appeared contrary to Italian interests and his plans. On the other hand, he sought to avoid "false steps', to the point of attempting to reconcile the irreconcilable: not to be absent from the use of force against England, making aircraft and submarines available, but to avoid committing himself fully in Egypt at least until the Germans had landed in England and he could then take the decisions he considered most appropriate. This, among other things, explains his growing nervousness (which translated into those recurring outbursts, largely directed at his collaborators, with which he tried to hide his embarrassment and shift the responsibility for

his wait-and-see attitude onto others) in the face of a situation in which the clouds, instead of dissipating, were gathering. In fact, while his certainty of victory remained unshaken, week after week it became increasingly doubtful that Italy's results would meet his expectations. Meanwhile, German initiatives multiplied, which he felt he had to counter, but often without any real possibility of doing so. This led to the frustrating necessity of settling for the generic assurances that Berlin provided whenever Rome raisedits objections, or a tiring and dangerous resort to subterfuge and counter-maneuvers, almost always doomed to failure. Characteristic in this regard are the alarms and irritations aroused in the summer by the statements of the German Minister of Economy, Walter Funk (who already the previous year had expressed intentions that Rome could not accept, such as thealignment of the lira with the mark, the creation of a 'mark area' as opposed to a 'pound area', and the revision of Italy's autarkic policy in order to curb industrial development and preserve the Italian economy's predominantly agricultural character, with obvious advantages for the German economy), made on July 25 regarding the economic content that was to characterize the new postwar European order, and in particular their conclusions: The plan I have prepared for the peacetime economy, these statements said, must guarantee the Greater German Reich maximum economic security and the German people maximum consumption of goods in order to improve national welfare. The European economy must be geared towards this goal. Such an approach was clearly unacceptable to Rome. First of all, because it would have led to the economic "satellization" of Italy with respect to Germany and an enlargement of the "mark area" (to which, moreover, Funk made explicit reference in the first part of his statements), in which the lira would inevitably have been swallowed up, if only because of thethe institutionalization of the clearing system, which Funk placed at the basis of future new bilateral and multilateral economic relations. Secondly, because it was, at that time, extremely impolitic, such as to arouse considerable hostility towards the Axis and discourage those in Europe who sympathized with it in the name of a new, more just social and economic organization that would ensure the development and well-being of all the peoples of the continent. And, finally, because ideologically it meant in practice the shelving of the plans for social renewal that fascism, partly sincerely and partly instrumentally, claimed it wanted to achieve through war both internally and, indeed, in relations between peoples. And these plans, however embryonic, confused, and unrealistic they may have been, went in a completely different direction; for example, towards declaring the Toro currency obsolete as an international means of payment and replacing it with one or more international currencies. This led to a series of steps taken through diplomatic channels and direct contacts with Funk by the Minister for Trade and Currency, Raffaello Riccardi, which continued until the second half of October, in order to obtain explanations from Berlin and reiterate the Italian position. In particular, three of its cornerstones: the validity for the post-war period; the establishment on a continental basis of an economy 'understood and implemented in a corporate sense', the only structure that would prevent 'the peoples, in a few years' time, from once again taking up arms to claim their right to life'; the establishment not of a single European economic unit (which would have entailed too many problems and difficulties in shifting interests and adapting many different economies to the new situation), but of 'two groupings, one headed

by Rome and the other in Berlin, largely interconnected and closely united in guiding the policy of economic collaboration on the European continent and that of relations with third parties." These steps, however, achieved only formal results. The Germans, in fact, in addition to giving the usual generic assurances to which they now resorted in these circumstances, limited themselves to accepting that the final communiqué of the Funk-Riccardi meetings should mention some of the Italian theses; their subsequent behavior, facilitated above all by the difficulties in which Italy soon found itself as a result of the war against Greece, would however demonstrate abundantly the purely platonic and dilatory value of their adherenceto the Italian point of view. Much of what Rome knew or believed it knew about Germany's military and political intentions regarding the developments of the conflict withEngland was the result of indirect and often unverifiable information, transmitted from Berlin by Alfieri and Marras, or gathered in Portugal and other neutral countries. The official German channels were in fact extremely sparing with news, and precisely on the issues that most interested Rome – secret contacts with London, preparations for the landing, etc. – they were very reserved, if not completely silent. After the failure in June-July of some cautious attempts to sound out Sweden, the US, and the Vatican on the possibility of starting negotiations, and after an explicit, albeit generic, offer of peace made by Hitler speaking to the Reichstag on July 19 had fallen on deaf ears, only statements attesting to the British willingness to continue the fight to the bitter end were coming from London, even though there were signs that even Churchill realized that for this to be truly possible, American intervention was essential, preferably accompanied by a crisis in German-Soviet relations. Regarding the landing, which at first had seemed imminent, the news was becoming less and less reassuring and its date was slipping further and further into the future. On July 7, Hitler, speaking with Ciano, said he was convinced that war with England would not be resolved; as for the landing, he referred to it as a "very delicate and complex" problem that was "still being studied by the General Staff," and he himself said that he had no information on the matter.England would not be resolved; as for the landing, he referred to it as a "very delicate and complex" problem that was "still being studied by the General Staff," and he wrote essentially the same thing to Mussolini a few days later. However, there were also persistent reports that not only were secret contacts between Berlin and London still ongoing, but even on the verge of being successfully concluded and that the landing operations were not yet complete for all nations. One of the most important aims of European collaboration after the war will be to improve the standard of living of the peoples as much as possible. The new European collaboration, understood in the sense of National Socialism and Fascism, therefore means the development of a healthy autarchy, which Germany andItaly consider to be the basis of future economic policy, and at the same time constitutes the prerequisite for profitable trade and exchange of goods with other economic centers of the world." For the events surrounding the failed landing, see R. Wheatley, Operation Sea Lion. German plans for the invasion of England 1940-1942, Oxford 1958; as well as Dokumente zvn Unternehmen "Seelove," Die geplante deutsche Landung in England, Göttingen-Berlin-Frankfurt 1959. See DDI, s. IX, V, pp. 1986 ff. See ibid., pp. 227 ff. initiated not because the preparations had not yet been completed or because of meteorological difficulties, as the Germans claimed, but

precisely to make a compromise peace possible. Hence Mussolini's growing distrust and irritation towards Germany and his fear that a sudden "outbreak of peace" would frustrate his plans and put him in a position of having to passively adapt to whatever decisions the Germans might make. This was all the more so because, meanwhile, there were increasing signs and indications (which the flood of news reaching Rome made appear even more numerous and worrying than they sometimes were) confirming or giving rise to fears of a growing tendency on the part of Berlin to disregard Italian interests and opinions, which it claimed to respect and take into account, to go back on its previous assurances and, once again, to overreachinto areas of Italian expansion and influence, burdening Italy with costs that Mussolini, especially at that moment, did not want to bear, without even granting the aid that Rome requested, and, finally, imposing its own decisions without discussing them in advance with its ally and trying to keep it as much as possible in the dark about both its intentions and the state of bilateral relations that were most important for an overall assessment of the prospects of the conflict (typical examples being those with Moscow, but also, to a certain extent, those with Tokyo). Without going into detail, we recall some of those that most alarmed and irritated Mussolini. We have already , we have spoken at length about the concerns raised by the German attitude towards Vichy after Mers-el-Kebir and, in particular, by the emergence of a push to include France in the anti-British coalition. We have also mentioned those caused by the Germans' unexpected interest in establishing a presence in Morocco and their growing dynamism in the Balkans. To these must be added the concerns raised in August in August by the Germans' refusal to supply or transfer war material to Italy, citing as justification the fact that they could not spare it at that time and, in the case of material captured in France, the difficulty of gathering it and restoring it to working order; this while they were supplying other countries and the OKW was letting Rome know that, in its opinion, if the landing in England had to be postponedlanding in England had to be postponed until the following year, Italy would have to bear the brunt of the operations, occupying Egypt and Palestine during the winter and ousting the British fleet from the Mediterranean, so that it could then send its own fleet to the Atlantic to participate, in the spring, with the German fleet in the landing operations. Theeffect that this complex set of facts and news must have had on Mussolini has so far been underestimated or misrepresented and linked essentially to the decision to attack Greece, seen, with few exceptions, by the vast majority of scholars of World War II and biographers of the "Duce" as a burst of wounded pride and an irrational reaction to the sudden news that Hitler had proceeded, without informing him, to send troops to Romania: "Hitler always presents me with a fait accompli. This time I will repay him in kind: he will learn from the newspapers that I have occupied Greece. Thus the balance will be restored." This is an overly simplistic view, suggested by Ciano's diary, which, in our opinion, is not very reliable in this respect, firstly because of its author's lack of psychological insight and his tendency to overemphasize the moodiness of his father-in-law's behavior, and secondly because of Ciano's obvious tendency to emphasize his own "realism" and 'sense of balance', shifting onto Mussolini responsibilities that were often his own and in some cases more his than his father-in-law's. In reality, the effect of this complex set of facts must have been much greater, such as to provoke not only the decision to attack Greece, and of a much more

political than mood-related nature. Nor, for that matter, is there any lack of indirect, but no less significant, evidence to prove this. Among these, the most revealing is perhaps what General Wilhelm Thoma told Liddell Hart after the war, namely that in mid-October 1940, before the attack on Greece, he was sent by Hitler to Italy (he arrived in Rome on the 15th) to discuss with Badoglio and Graziani the participation of German armored troops in operations in Egypt. His testimony suggests that at that time, the Duce's concerns and irritation of the "Duce" towards his ally must have been so intense that Hitler (who had met with Mussolini a few days earlier, on October 4, at Brenner) was in turn concerned to the point of fearing a reversal of the Italian front. Speaking of his mission in Italy and, in particular, the reasons that had led Hitler to entrust it to him, General Thoma stated: His intention to propose sending German troops to Africa was political. He feared that Mussolini might switch sides if Germany did not help him to strengthen the resistance. But he wanted to send as small a contingent as possible. However, it was unthinkable that Mussolini would consider breaking away from Germany or changing alliances: apart from any other consideration, this would have meant his political demise and the occupation ofItaly by Germany. However, the episode is important in assessing the degree of deterioration that relations between the two countries had undergone in the space of a few months and in realizing that the Germans' distrust of the Italians and their keeping them in the dark about as much as possible cannot be explained, as they sometimes said and as has often been repeated, solely by the fear of the "natural" and irresponsible loquacity . To conclude our discussion of Mussolini's attitude towards operations in North Africa between June and October 1940, all that remains at this point is to proceed to a parallel re-reading of the 'hot moments' of it and of the political context (whether real or not is of little importance, since appearance, in certain situations, is just as important as reality and determines the same reactions) in which they manifested themselves; that is, those moments in which Mussolini appears determined to break the deadlock and, in fact, gave precise orders to Badoglio and Oraziani to go on the offensive. And it is only on the basis of such a political reading that we can truly understand and explain, in general and in individual, and apparently contradictory, moments, his attitude (and with it various other initiatives and positions taken by Mussolini) and overcome the overly reductive and stifling explanations put forward so far. The first of these "hot moments" occurred in the decade following the entry into force of the armistices with France, when the German landing in England was considered imminent in Rome. Hence Mussolini's offer to contribute "with ground and air forces" to the attack (June 26) and Badoglio's order to Oraziani to be ready to go on the offensive by July 15, an order that was, however, practically dropped after Ciano met Hitler on July 7 and 10 and Hitler wrote to Mussolini that the landing was still under consideration and was shelved as soon as the British showed no intention of accepting thepeace offer made by the Führer to the Reichstag on July 19. The second "critical moment" occurred on August 19, when Mussolini telegraphed Oraziani to be ready to attack "on the day the first platoon of German soldiers touches English soil." The origin of this order can be found in Ciano's diary under the date of the previous day: ..From Berlin, a series of reports suggest that a decisive attack against Great Britain is imminent. Mussolini believes them to be accurate and is convinced that by the end of next month we will have victory and peace. For

this reason, he wants to speed things up in Egypt. The modification of this order ten days later, to attack even if the Germans had not begun the landing, constitutes the third "critical moment."'; however, his logic, which was entirely political as usual, was slightly different: it was not only the desire to contribute in some way to the defeat of England, but also the fear that Berlin and London were about to conclude a peace agreement of which Rome would only be informed after the fact. This fear, fueled by news from various sources, even Soviet and Japanese, had been plaguing Rome for several weeks; However, what made it "operational," so to speak, was the increasingly consistent news in the last week of August that the landing would almost certainly be postponed until the following year. This, added to the previous reports, must have reinforced Mussolini's idea that Berlin and London were negotiating without his knowledge. Hence the new instructions to Oraziani and his increasingly frequent talk of a "long war," that is, until the spring of 1941. Von Ribbentrop's visit to Rome, from September 19 to 22, took place a few days after the occupation of Sidi-el-Barrani and immediately before the failed Anglo-Gaullist attack on Dakar. The German Foreign Minister brought Mussolini two pieces of news: the signing, a few days later, on the 27th, in Vienna, of the Tripartite Pact and the which later proved to be unfounded, of intervention in the Spanish conflict (according to Ciano's version, 'in the short term', according to what Mussolini reported to Badoglio, when the Germans would attack England), which, combined with the assurance that 'according to the Führer's intentions, France will never have an important role in European life," filled Mussolini with satisfaction, reinforced his conviction that the war would not end before the following spring or summer, and almost completely allayed his fears. Hence his immediate thinking that around mid-October Graziani should resume the offensive and take Marsa Matruh; without, however, going so far as to mortgage the future and without thinking of further operations in the winter months, which the conquest of Marsa Matruh should, at least for the moment, appear to him to be aimed, on the one hand, at achieving a prestigious success and, on the other, at securing for the Air Force a more suitable forward base than those in Libya for attacking Alexandria and the Suez Canal and, finally, more generally, at supporting the Middle East policy of Palazzo Chigi, which, as has just been said, was thanks to the presence in power of el Gaylani in Iraq. The best proof that Mussolini did not intend to jeopardize the future in any way with the offensive on Marsa Matruh is found in his directives to Badoglio and Graziani on October 5, in which the aftermath of the defeat of the Egyptian or Greek "pillar" was left entirely open. As for the fact that he did not think, once Marsa Matruh had been taken, of other operations until spring, this can be inferred from the fact that he did not consider the Egyptian or Greek "pillar" to be completely compromised.' pillar, i.e. the Egyptian or Greek pillar, was left completely unaffected. As for the fact that he did not envisage any other operations until spring after taking Marsa Matruh, this can be deduced from the fact that, in the same days in which he took and transmitted his decision to the two marshals, the Ministry of War, on his orders, began the demobilization of about 600,000 reservists: on October 1, a largeofficers and enlisted men of the classes of 1899 and earlier, and on October 9, also part of those of the classes of 1910-15. It is true that Mussolini had been mulling over this decision since July, and that it had been urged upon him for economic reasons by the Minister of Finance, but given its scope (on June 1, the effective

force was 1,634,950 men, 300,000 less than the organic strength of the 73 mobilized divisions) makes it unthinkable that Mussolini could have taken it while anticipating other operations in the short term and then maintained it even in the face of objections from Roatta and Soddu (to whom, and this is another significant element, he said he wanted to have a million men in perfect efficiency by February men in perfect working order) who considered it excessive and likely to create a crisis situation in the army structure for several months. The last and most dramatic "hot moment" was the one that led to theattack on Greece. Formally, the trigger was the German entry into Romania, and in fact, both those who believed that Mussolini's decision was merely the manifestation of a sudden and irrational mood swing and those, such as André, who rightly sought to give a political explanation for it, emphasized this point. However, limiting oneself to considering this single element is once again too simplistic. Mussolini's decision must also have been influenced by other more substantial reasons, the result of his resurgent distrust of the Germans and his fear of other possible developments in the general political situation that would conflict with all his plans and which he therefore had to counter at any cost, even resorting to the most drastic measures. Although Mussolini had been mulling it over for several days, he gave instructions for the resumption of theoffensive in Egypt only after meeting with Hitler on October 4 at Brenner and confirming his assessment of the situation. On his return from Brenner, he made an inspection tour of Emilia and Veneto and returned to Rome on the 12th, while German troops and aircraft entered Romania, officially to defend the oil-rich area of Ploesti from British attempts at "sabotage from the air" and to train the Romanian armed forces. It is natural that this new and serious manifestation of German dynamism in the Balkans should have adversely affected and irritated (also for reasons of prestige) the "Duce," especially considering that he was unaware of the change in Hitler's attitude toward the USSR. However, it is unlikely that Mussolini and even more so Ciano, who had been able to closely follow the developments from Rome in the previous days, were completely taken by surprise. Although in very vague terms and referring only to a possible dispatch of "training formations" "as requested by General Antonescu," von Ribbentrop had mentioned it to Ciano in Berlin in September, so much so that the German embassy in Rome had referred to this previous communication in the verbal note with which, on October 1, Palazzo Chigi had been informed, albeit in general terms, of the positive German response to the Romanian request. And even at Brenner, although nothing appears in the Italian and German minutes, it must have been mentioned in some way, if Ro, referring to Graziani what Soddu had told him about the talks on October 4, wrote: "Romania: We must, in some way, support the German mission by sending a regiment (Soddu is thinking of the 30th Grenadiers)." Mussolini may have been taken by surprise by the speed with which the Germans moved, by the scale of theoperation and the fact that the Italians had been excluded from it, but not by the thing itself, because he had to take it for granted by then and certainly not consider it as something that could cause such a dramatic crisis, since at least since the 9th he had approved the text of the communiqué prepared by the Ministry of Popular Culture to be issued when the Germans announced thethe dispatch of their troops. This text not only did not sound critical of the Germans, which was natural, but also contained an appreciation ("the truth is that peace in the Balkans has found a new

and decisive reason for security")), which the "Duce" would have spared himself if he had already thought at that moment that the German initiative should be responded to with an attack on Greece. Excluding complete surprise, it is also to be excluded that Mussolini was looking for a pretext to attack Greece. We have already said that there is no doubt about his intentions to "teach it a lesson": but certainly not at that moment, withwinter approaching, the army in difficulty as a result of the massive demobilization he had ordered and already begun of almost a third of its strength, the troops in Albania poorly equipped and insufficient for large-scale action at very short notice, and he himself entirely focused on the offensive in Egypt; not to mention the political considerations that in August had convinced him that the moment of "reckoning" with Greece, whatever Ciano said, had not yet arrived and that in the meantime they had certainly not lost their validity. Before the Greek "pillar" could be considered a current objective, Oraziani would have to conquer Marsa Matruh; after that, in the spring, it would be decided whether to proceed with its destruction or to start the third phase of the battle for Egypt. And it could not be ruled out that the "showdown" with Greece might be postponed until victory had been achieved, at the peace table. Ultimately, even though it was predominant, Ciano's role in the decision to attack Greece cannot be considered decisive. There is no doubt that in August the Foreign Minister had not resigned himself to postponing the attack and that he was now working hard to push his father-in-law to act ("Ciano and Jacomoni want war and will probably get it," Armellini noted on the 15th), trumpeting for this purpose the "mood of the Ciamurian people, who are very favorable to us" and boasting of the decisive results achieved, according to him, thanks to the maneuvers and corruption he had carried out in Ciamuria and what mattered most among the Greek leadership; and there is also no doubt that with his behavior, Ciano "spread disproportionate and unjustified optimismoptimism and instilled the conviction that this was not a war, because he had already secured victory by "buying" some Greek politicians and generals: at the time of the invasion, Chameria would rise up against Greece, thethe Hellenic army would not fight, and a pro-Italian government was already almost ready to replace that of Metaxas."5 However, from this to attributing to Ciano almost the entire responsibility for 'convincing' Mussolini. With his optimism and his superficiality, Ciano was able to reinforce Mussolini's decision to act against Greece and make him believe that victory would be even easier than the 'Duce' thought (and, therefore, opt for a larger-scale action than he had initially thought) and convey this conviction to others in his father-in-law's entourage, just as he was able to keep alive Mussolini's distrust of the Germans and his fear of being played by them until the very end. Beyond these responsibilities, however heavy they may be, we do not believe that Ciano can be attributed any others. The decision was Mussolini's and his alone (and perhaps more painful than is believed, if, as General Visconti Prasca wrote, towards the end of the meeting held at Palazzo Venezia on October 15, he asked him: "So are we sure of victory?") and stemmed directly from his idea of the war, the objectives he wanted to achieve with it, and his fear that things were now on the verge of a turning point that would nullify or almost nullify all his hopes, not by the enemy, but by his ally, whom he had always distrusted, and the facts seemed to confirm that he was right. This also explains the effort he had to make to convince even those who, like most of the military leaders, due to technical knowledge,

hostility towards risky ventures, mentality, and character. The case of Badoglio is emblematic, regardless of what he said and wrote later, when things went wrong in Greece and after the war. Although he was instinctively hostile to the war in Greece (for technical reasons) and did not change his opinion, even threatening to resign in private, Badoglio, after arguing on October 14 that it would not be possible for at least three months without ten additional divisions, not only did he accept Mussolini's view "that the action in Epirus and Corfu should be started immediately with the troops already in place and with the reserve of developing it in depth with the forces that would arrive in the meantime by landing in the Gulf of Arta', contenting himself with a two-day postponement of the start of operations, from October 26 to 28, but also to help the other military leaders who, like him, were opposed to it to accept it. This was achieved, in particular, through his ambiguous attitude and his technical endorsement of the operation in Epirus proposed by General Visconti Prasca during the meeting on October 15 at Palazzo Venezia, which sanctioned the attack on Greece, and then, in the days immediately following, dropping the request (which he had initially accepted) for a meeting with Mussolini to re-discuss the whole issue in accordance with the wishes of the chiefs of staff of the Navy and Air ForceAir Force chiefs of staff, Cavagnari and Pricolo, who had not been summoned to Palazzo Venezia on the 15th. It would be too easy to attribute all this to Badoglio's weakness of character and lack of professional responsibility. Nor is it sufficient to explain such an attitude by concern for the more difficult climatic conditions in which the attack would have to take place andCiano's ostentatious confidence regarding the internal unrest that was supposed to occur in Greece in parallel with the Italian attack. At most, these can explain the letter written by Badoglio on October 22 to De Vecchi: Dear De Vecchi, on the 28th, the punitive expedition against Greece will begin. These Greek pigs will get the treatment they deserve. There will certainly be a reaction from the British fleet and air force. Bring it on. We are ready to receive them. I am very calm about the Aegean. You and your magnificent soldiers are there. Starting at midnight on the 27th-28th, torpedo everything that flies the Greek flag. Long live Italy, long live its King Emperor, long live the Duce. Even taking all this into account, it is more likely that, despite his continuing technical concerns, Badoglio ended up accepting Mussolini's point of view because he was convinced (or unable to refute) by the political arguments that Mussolini had to put forward to him and which neither of them subsequently deemed appropriate to discuss for understandable, albeit different, reasons. Symptomatic in this regard is the fact that, on October 31, writing to General Marras, Badoglio expressed himself in terms that leave little room for doubt about his real position at that moment with regard to the Greek affair: As for Greece, it was perhaps better to avoid it, given our very limited resources and the lack of material aid that the Allies had given us so far, but in the situation that had arisen, the operation appeared unavoidable. At this point, the obvious question is: why "unavoidable"?? If the attack on Greece was merely a consequence of the German entry into Romania, or if this was how it was presented to Badoglio, it is unlikely that the marshal would have considered it 'unavoidable.' Nor were there any reasons to believe that there were compelling military reasons for making it so. Only Roatta and Badoglio mention a supposed threat to Italy represented by Greece in reference to their meeting with Mussolini on the morning of October 14. On that occasion, the 'Duce' , according to the former, told

them that Greece's attitude "had become so favorable to the 'Allies' that he considered it inevitable to declare war on it and occupy it," and according to Badoglio, he justified his decision with the "aim of removing all support for the British fleet and eliminating British influence in that country." Nothing emerges from other sources, not even from the SIM, so it can be ruled out that this argument had any decisive weight. This is confirmed by the fact that, at the meeting on October 15, Mussolini did not resort to it, but used other reasons to corroborate his decision, of a general strategic nature (emphasizing not the danger that Greece posed to Italy but the advantages that Italy would gain over the British) and, above all, of a politicaland economic reasons (in which an indirect reference to the Germans can be detected): "The territorial objectives," he said at the opening of the meeting, "must lead us to take possession of the entire southern coast of Albania, that is, those that will give us control of the Ionian islands of Zakynthos, Cephalonia, Corfu, and the conquest of Thessaloniki. When we have achieved these objectives, we will have improved our position in the Mediterranean vis-à-vis England. At a later stage, or in conjunction with these actions, the complete occupation of Greece, to put it out of action and to ensure that it will remain within our political-economic space in all circumstances. The 'imperative nature' of the aggression against Greece must be sought elsewhere, in the overall political context in which Germany entered Romania, in the news that reached Rome about German intentions, and in the assessments and fears that they aroused in Mussolini and Ciano. In terms of memoirs, the only one who, albeit in general terms, focused on this context was Anfuso. Retracing the events from June to October 1940 from the perspective of relations between Rome and Berlin and the mistrust and "misunderstandings" that characterized them (which he attributed essentially to Hitler's desire to keep his plans for war in the East hidden from Mussolini for fear of Ciano's indiscretions), he wrote thatthe German influx into Romania, coming after the Germans' opposition in the summer to Italian action against Greece in the name of the need not to alter the situation in the Balkans and not to offer Moscow any pretext for further interference in the region, prompted Mussolini to break the deadlock, both to 'counterbalance the German influence that was beginning to be predominant in all the capitals of Eastern Europe' and because of the fear "that if the war ended with the capitulation of England before he reached Suez or descended into the Balkans, the German dictator would treat him in the same way as on June 19, 1940," that is, he would serve him the classic dish of lentils at the peace table. If we add the appropriate references to how the general political situation in Rome appeared to be evolving, this explanation allows us to understand why Mussolini and Badoglio, following in his footsteps, considered the attack on Greece to be "unavoidable. As in previous "critical moments," the fear was that the conflict would soon come to an end. However, what dramatized the situation and caused the fear to exceed the danger level that, for better or worse, had not been exceeded on other occasions, was the conviction that this time the danger was more real and imminent and that the damage to Italy would be greater than that feared on previous occasions: from a peace negotiated at that time between Berlin and London, Italy would have seen not only its claims against England satisfied only to a minimal extent, but also those against France drastically reduced. And all this while Germany would have achieved what it had set out to achieve; it would have established its unchallenged hegemony over the continent, even if it

had theoretically recognized areas of Italian influence (it was no coincidence that for several weeks British propaganda had taken for granted the loss of Hungary and Romania to Germany); it would have spread throughout Africa and probably also in the Middle East; and, in cauda venenum, unlike Italy, it could present itself to the French as the loyal and chivalrous victor, willing to forget old conflicts and to recognize in concrete terms (at Italy's expense) the merits of the new France. For it was here, in Germany's relations with the Vichy government, that lay the real and decisive reason for Mussolini's fears and, therefore, the trigger for the attack on Greece, which he intended not only to secure, before it was no longer possible, at least some of the territorial and strategic advantages he wanted to acquire in the Balkans and the Mediterranean, but also, most likely, as a last-ditch attempt to prevent a compromise agreement between Berlin and London, thus making the idea of a separate peace with France less appealing and urgent in Hitler's eyes. The person who, more than anyone else, understood the real reason for Mussolini's attack on Greece was Marshal Caviglia. In his diary, under the dates of October 29 and 30, 1940, we read: Mussolini, realizing that he had been outmaneuvered by his colleague, decided to attack Greece, an ally of England, and began the action by breaking Hitler's eggs in the basket. Hitler rushed to Florence to stop him. Had they made an agreement? I may be partly or completely wrong, but I await events to prove me wrong. It may also be that negotiations with England broke down before the attack on Greece. This means that we will soon have a new speech from Hitler and the action against Greece will continue. Perhaps Mussolini feels that German interests are in conflict with Italy, which had to delay and then give up its action against Yugoslavia because Hitler was negotiating with it. Germany, by giving up its industrial products, will obtain all of Yugoslavia's agricultural products; that is, it will sell what it does not need for its own people, thus excluding Italy from Yugoslavia. It seems that a Franco-German alliance treaty will end up excluding Italy from Tunisia, Corsica, and Nice. Overall, Hitler is working for Germany, not for the Axis, and Italy is gradually being "screwed over." To understand this emotional-political mechanism, the echoes and interpretations aroused in Rome, both at Palazzo Venezia and Palazzo Chigi as well as at the Supreme Command, by the events in Mers-el-Kebir and especially Dakar ("the star of the new France is rising," General Armellini significantly noted in his diary on September 27), the appointment of Abetz as ambassador to the Pétain government, theattitude taken by Berlin towards Spanish claims, and what Hitler had said to Mussolini on October 4 at Brenner about his hope "to have French forces at our side in a continental coalition against Great Britain" and the possibility of a separate peace with France. To these events must be added Chamberlain's resignation, which was understood as an indication of the crisis that would trouble the Churchill government and which was thought to have the potential for further developments, especially if France also explicitly sided with the anti-British front. It was no coincidence that Mussolini recalled along with the possibility that Hitler would negotiate peace with Pétain, in the letter he sent to Badoglio on October 5 ordering Oraziani to launch the offensive on Marsa Matruh, and, again, the barrage of news reports in those same days that peace negotiations between Berlin and Vichy were imminent, if not already underway (news that in turn fueled a series of hypotheses for preventive countermeasures, also very significant, such as the occupation of Corsica and Tunisia) and which heralded,

albeit confusedly, what would soon be Hitler's meetings with Lavai and Pétain in Montoire. Various sources testify more or less explicitly, but unequivocally, to the creation of this tense and heated atmosphere as early as September. Among these, we recall General Armellini's diary and the memos that Roatta sent to Oraziani to inform him of the activities of the Army General StaffArmy General Staff and the Supreme Command and, more generally, of the situation as it was seen in Rome, and also the directives that Pavolini gave to the press, which are also very significant in understanding, through what the country was supposed to know and what enemies and allies were supposed to read between the lines, what most concerned Mussolini and his closest entourage. However, the document that perhaps best testifies to and summarizes all this is, in our opinion, the letter in which Mussolini informed Hitler of his decision to attack Greece "very soon." A large part of it, practically the entire beginning, is devoted to France, its true Stimmung, and, therefore, the impossibility of any hypothesis of its collaboration with the Axis, as well as the full and total reconfirmation of Italian territorial claims against France itself, has already been quoted by us in the first part of this chapter. We will therefore dwell on it only to make two particular observations. One concerns its conclusion: "It is now a question of seeing whether the time is ripe for this clarification of Axis-France relations. And on this essential point, I would be very pleased to hear your opinion." Read in the light of the mistrust of theally and the fears that were troubling Mussolini at that time, seems to be a request for clarification, not of Axis-France relations, but of Germany-Italy relations with regard to France. The other concerns the placement of the passage on France at the beginning of the letter itself, which, although intended to inform Hitler of Mussolini's decision regarding Greece, thus takes on a very particular character, clearly revealing the state of'Duce's state of mind and the political significance he attributed to the attack on Greece. Having reiterated his position on France, Mussolini only mentioned this in the middle of the letter and in the context of an overall examination of 'British positions on the continent' and the operations of the Axis, so as not to dramatize it and present it as an initiative that was, on the one hand, necessary and useful to both countries and, on the other, no different from that carried out at the time by Germany with the attack on Norway: I believe that in the event of a prolongation of the war, you will agree with me that it is essential to dismantle the remaining British positions in the European continent. This dismantling is another condition for victory. They are as follows: Portugal, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, and Switzerland. As for Portugal, its attitude is neutralized by Spain. We must have no illusions about the true Yugoslav sentiment towards the Axis. It is irrevocably hostile. I enclose a report from my police force that demonstrates the Yugoslav mentality and criminal activity towards Italy. It is a bad neighbor and has a bad conscience. Yugoslavia cannot live as it is. Serbs and Croats are now further apart than ever. The Macek experiment has completely failed. For the moment, I do not intend to change Italy's attitudetowards Yugoslavia, which is one of careful vigilance. As for Greece, I am determined to break the deadlock very soon. Greece is one of the cornerstones of British maritime strategy in the Mediterranean. The British king, the British political class, and the Greek people are immature but educated in hatred towards Italy. Greece has proceeded to mobilize its forces and, since May, has made air bases and naval bases available to Great Britain, as can be seen from the documents that von Ribbentrop was kind enough to send

me after the discovery of Vitry la Charité: in recent days, British officers have practically taken possession of all the camps in Greece. In short, Greece is to the Mediterranean what Norway was to the North Sea, and it must not escape the same fate. I believe that Turkey, another pawn in the British game, will not move, especially if you increase, as you will certainly doAs for Egypt, the resumption of operations is subject to a tough logistical preparation, similar to what you had to do in anticipation of the landing in Great Britain. In any case, I hope to be able to conduct the action simultaneously on both the Greek and Egyptian fronts. Once this second offensive phase, which must conquer the stronghold of Marsa Matruh (230 km from Alexandria), is over, the decisive battle of the Delta will remain to be fought. It is for this phase that the contribution of your armored vehicles must be examined. General Thoma, who has gone to Cyrenaica, will will report to him. Finally, another passage in the letter cannot be ignored, typical of Mussolini's modus operandi, but also indicative of his desire not to dramatize relations with Germany beyond a certain limit. This is the passage immediately following the one just quoted, in which, as a tacit quid pro quo, the 'Duce' offered Hitler a sort of free hand, hitherto denied him, to dismantle Switzerland if he so wished: 'I am sure you will not be surprised,' he wrote, to see Switzerland included among Great Britain's remaining continental positions. With its incomprehensible hostile attitude, Switzerland is itself posing the problem of its existence. For the German attitude towards Switzerland, see D. Bourgeois, Le Troisième Reich et la Suisse 1933-1941, Neuchâtel 1974, and in particular pp. 130 ff. relating to the summer-autumn period of 1940, the plans to attack and dismember Switzerland during that period, and their ideological, economic, and political motivations (not least the discovery in France of clear evidence of the distinctly pro-Western attitude of the highest Swiss military hierarchy). As far as Rome knew, the Germans wanted to assign only Ticino to Italy. Apart from its hostility to any territorial expansion of France (to which French-speaking Switzerland would have gone), Rome believed thatItaly should also be given Valais and Graubünden for geographical, historical, and strategic reasons, and that the border with Germany should run along the central chain of the Alps. See ddi, s. IX, V, pp. 40 ff. and, above all, the annex to the same report in asmae, Political Affairs, Switzerland, b. 22 (1940). Although the German side responded to cautious Italian inquiries aimed at ascertaining the reliability of the news reaching Rome on the matter denying that they had the intentions attributed to them, the possibility of having to intervene in Switzerland had been seriously considered by the Supreme Command since July 7 (see ACS, R. Oraziani, b. 58, phase. 47, subfasc. 9, memorandum from Roatta to Graziani dated July 9, 1940, sub July 7). See A. Rovighi, Un secolo di relazioni militari tra Italia e Svizzera 1861-1961, Rome 1987, pp. 177 ff.; G. A. Chevallaz, Les plans italiens face à la Suisse en 1938-1943, Pully 1988. In fact, however, the Italians were opposed to the dismemberment of Switzerland, both because they did not want to have another border in common with Germany, and above all for economic and commercial reasons. A break-up would have handed over a large part of Swiss industry to the Germans, while Italy's interest was, for the future, to bring Switzerland back into its sphere of economic influence and, for the present, to be able to draw as much as possible on its industrial potential. It is certainly not without significance in this regard that, in the summer of 1940, Minister R. Riccardi suggested to one of the most

important figures in Swiss industry, E. Bührle, to transfer his factories to Milan and merge with Fiat in order to avoid the danger of falling under German dependence (see D. Bourgeois, Le Troisième Reich et la Suisse cit., passim and especially pp. 295 ff.; M. Rigonalli, Le Tessin dans les relations entre la Suisse et l'Italie 1922-1940, Locamo 1983, pp. 245 ff.; as well as H. Homberger, La politique commerciale de la Suisse durant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale, Neuchâtel 1972, passim and especially pp. 41, 67 ff. and 76); and, more generally, A. Lasserre, La Suisse des années sombres. Courants d'opinion pendant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale 1939-1945, Lausanne 1989. Hostile to Switzerland and, all things considered, in favor of its dismemberment was Vittorio Emanuele III. There are numerous testimonies to this effect in the memoirs of the time (see, for example, G. Gorla, LTtalia nella seconda guerra mondiale. Diario di un milanese, ministro del re nel governo Mussolini, Milan 1959, p. 303; as well as, at a scientific level, E. R. Rosen, Viktor Emanuel III. und die Schweiz während des Zweiten Weltkrieges, in "Revue suisse d'histoire," October-December 1960, pp. 533 ff.). News had already leaked to Berlin a few days earlier that Mussolini intended to attack Greece, so much so that Wilhelms trasche had proposed taking strong action against Rome to dissuade him. Hitler, however, had blocked the idea, probably fearing that it might anger Mussolini and push him toward even more dangerous decisions. Furthermore, the Führer on the one hand, must have thought he still had time to act personally on Mussolini (the American presidential elections were to be held on November 5, and Hitler must have believed that the "Duce" would not make a move before then) and, on the other hand, must have breathed a sigh of relief: if Mussolini was thinking of attacking Greece, it meant that he was not thinking of changing alliances. Nevertheless, the letter from the 'Duce' delivered to him as he was returning to Germany from his meetings with Franco and Pétain deeply irritated him and prompted him to rush back to Italy to meet with him. The meeting took place in Florence on October 28. Since the attack on Greece had already begun a few hours earlier, the two politicians discussed the general situation and, in particular, theoutcome of Hitler's talks with the Spanish and French. Mussolini reiterated what he had written in his letter about France, which, "having lost the war, must pay," but all in all, since Hitler had made the best of a bad situation with Greece, he was keen to appear less intransigent than the Germans might have expected: he accepted a "purely passive cooperation" from France and agreed with the principle that, once the war was won, France could have "its compensation at the expense of England." According to the official communiqué, the meeting ended with a perfect agreement. In reality, there were very few points of agreement and, as far as Greece was concerned, the fact that Berlin did not break off relations with Athens for the time being shows that Hitler, despite having to resign himself to the fait accompli, had not changed his mind in the slightest. Moreover, the Führer never forgave Italy for an adventure that he considered doomed to failure from a military point of view, given the characteristics of the terrain and the season chosen, and likely to create serious political complications for the Axis, even if his resentment was directed more at Ciano than at the "Duce" (a week after the meeting in Florence, he would still describe him to Goebbels as "the only great man" the Italians had), but rather at Ciano, whom he considered to be the real person responsible for the attack on Greece, and at "that fossilized world," "that aristocratic mafia" "made up of cretins" that were the military leaders

Mussolini had to use. In the last weeks of his life, Hitler would go so far as to attribute Germany's defeat to the "useless" and "crazy" campaign in Greece, stating that in order to deal with the situation it had created in the Balkans, he had had to delay the attack on the Soviet Union by a few decisive weeks, which had prevented him from achieving his objectives before winter the objectives he had set himself before winter. At the time, while waiting to see how things would turn out, the Germans' reactions, however negative, were on the whole moderate, careful to save face to a certain extent and not to provide the enemy's propaganda with arguments in addition to those already provided by Mussolini. However, their attitude began to change as soon as, after about ten days of relative uncertainty, the situation became increasingly unfavorable for the Italian army and the attack on Greece took on the character of a real setback with equally serious repercussions on the maritime front and in North Africa. From any point of view, the months of November, December 1940 and January 1941 were in fact the most dramatic of the entire war for the Italian armed forces. There would be other similar and even more serious moments during the course of the war, but none would be so striking and have such traumatic repercussions and consequences for the image ofItaly, the regime, and Mussolini himself. This was true both domestically, within the country and in political and military circles, and abroad, among adversaries and neutrals, but also among allies and friends. That Italian military power was not what it had appeared to be during the Ethiopian campaign and what the regime had boasted about for years was now a fact more or less accepted by all; that this could manifest itself in such a sensational and incontrovertible way and, moreover, with an adversary such as Greece, which could not fail to be considered objectively the weaker, and in a theater of war that largely presupposed traditional operations, of the kind that theItalian army had faced during the First World War, but no one had foreseen it. Hence the particular resonance, as well as the objective gravity, that the events of the Greek campaign had, especially in the three most dramatic months, namely November, December, and January, when the Greeks went on the counteroffensive, pushed Italian troops back across the Albanian border (on December 6, they occupied Santiquaranta and two days later Argirocastro) and even threatened to throw them into the sea, while the British settled in Crete and Lemnos, extending the range of their aircraft to include the Romanian oil wells. Meanwhile, a formation of British torpedo bombers based on the aircraft carrier Illustrious attacked the roadstead of Taranto on the night between November 11 and 12, putting three battleships out of action, the Littorio, the Duilio, and the Cavour. Less than a month later, on December 9, Oraziani's troops were counterattacked by Wavell's and, within two months, forced to retreat with heavy losses to the Gulf of Sirte. The repercussions of the Greek campaignwithin the regime and its various components and in the country as a whole will be examined in the fourth and fifth chapters. What we are interested in highlighting here is the significance and consequences it had for Mussolini, for his conception of war, and for relations with Germany. To say, as everyone essentially says, that the Greek campaign, on the one hand, was, as the first real defeat suffered by theAxis, it played a decisive role in discouraging other countries from joining the Axis or in making definitive the orientation in that direction, which might still have been modifiable if the Axis had continued to prove invincible (think especially of Spain) and that, on the other hand, it marked the end of the

'parallel war', that is, Mussolini's efforts to ensure Italian policy's autonomy from German policy, and the beginning of a new phase of Italian participation in the war in which Italy would gradually assume the character of a satellite of Germany. This is undoubtedly correct, but it is not sufficient. In particular, it is not sufficient in the context of a biography of Mussolini. In fact, as we have already mentioned, even when he had to give up his "parallel war," Mussolini did not give up on positioning himself from a subjective point of view, but, if he believed he could do so without revealing too much, also from a political point of view.

3The problem of Italy's participation in the conflict in terms that were partially different and sometimes conflicting with the political strategy of its ally, whose decisions it knew it could now only influence to a minimal extent and certainly not avoid, but which it viewed with a mixture of rationality and irrationality: of suspicion and concern, both for the political conduct of the war and for the situation that, at its conclusion, he would find himself having to face, which was completely different from what he had imagined, and, at the same time, resentful frustration, which, in moments of elation, when the course of the war seemed to bring victory closer, pushed him towards attitudes and initiatives incompatible with his specific weight within theA state of mind, in short, that certainly did not help the clarity of mutual relations, caused damaging imbalances, especially for the Italian side, and irritated the Germans, accentuating their tendency to reduce Italy to a condition of complete subordination. From October 30 to November 2, Mussolini went to Puglia to closely follow the offensive against Greece, confident that it would not only be victorious but also swift. He had no doubts about this, primarily because of his conviction of the "superiority" of Italian men and soldiers over their Greek counterparts; then the assurances of Ciano and Jacomoni that there were forces in Greece ready to support the Italian troops (the Ciamuriota irredentism) and to take advantage of the opportunity to liquidate the pro-English tendencies and take power themselves by forming a pro-Italian government; and, finally, despite his low opinion of Badoglio, the fact that the Chief of Staff, although he had not favored it, had in fact accepted the idea of war with Greece and, more importantly, had given his technical approval to the operational plan proposed by General Visconti Prasca. With this assurance, the fact that theoffensive proceeded slowly at first was initially attributed by him to the poor weather conditions and did not worry him excessively. However, this explanation only held water for a short time. From that moment on, he began to harbor a growing fear that the operations might take a different course than expected and that defeating the Greeks would be a long and difficult task. He tried to hide this fear by ostentatiously displaying not only confidence in the final victory but also no hurry to achieve it. On the afternoon of November 4, during a meeting with Badoglio, Soddu, Cavagnari, Pricolo, and Roatta to examine the problem of sending reinforcements to Albania, Badoglio, who suggested the need not to proceed hastily, in bits and pieces, but in an organized manner, replied: As for haste, no one is less hasty than I am. I believe that a second winter at war would be worrying for Italy, but that it is essential for us that the war lasts throughout the winter. When peace comes, we will have made more sacrifices and therefore have more rights. After all, we are sure of defeating the Greeks, and with this certainty, there is no need to rush. Parallel to this fear, a dull resentment grew in him towards those whom he immediately considered responsible for what was happening, not without reason (although this does not mean, of course, that he was not primarily responsible): Ciano, Jacomoni, Visconti Prasca, and Badoglio. However, it is difficult to say whether his behavior towards them was due to a miscalculation of politics, a 'partisan spirit,' or love for his daughter Edda (in the case of Ciano, and consequently, inevitably, Jacomoni as well), but it was very different: 'absolution,' at least formal, towards the first two, even if the inclusion of the Foreign Minister in the group of ministers and hierarchs sent by Mussolini to the front and, therefore, his removal from the effective direction of

foreign policy for three whole months (from the end of January to the end of April 1941) and the order he gave to investigate his behavior during an unpleasant episode in Puglia, where Ciano's squadron was based, perhaps suggest that he was still exasperated with his son-in-law and wanted to make him understand this. On the other hand, he initially (on November 9) sent Soddu to Albania as commander-in-chief of the armed forces engaged against Greece in an attempt to rectify the situation, but less than two months later (on December 29), he replaced him with Cavallero, who, as we shall see, had in the meantime been appointed chief of staff in place of Badoglio. Extremely significant in terms of the maturing of both this state of mind and the crisis in the 'Duce's' relations with Badoglio is what happened at Palazzo Venezia on the morning of November 1, when the Italian offensive had by then completely petered out and the Greeks were going on the counter-offensive, during a meeting with Badoglio and the heads of the three armed forces to take stock of the situation. From his very first words, Mussolini launched into a violent attack on everyone, including Ciano, even though he did not mention him by name: The purpose of this meeting, he said, is to take stock of the situation in Albania 14 days after the start of operations. The first observation to be made is that things have not gone as we might have thought and as we had hoped, and the political leader Lieutenant General for Albania Lacomoni, and General Visconti Frasca, Commander of the troops in Albania. Visconti Frasca's plan was based on two elements: one military (a certain number of divisions), the other political (an uprising that was supposed to break out behind Greek troops). Doubts remained about some acts of sabotage that could be considered feasible by the fifth column. None of this happened; in fact, exactly the opposite happened. While there was no sign of revolt by the populations of Chameria behind the Greek troops, there were, on the contrary, some very serious incidents involving certain Albanian units.... So, a situation that is clearly contrary to what we have been told, at least in this initial period. In the absence of these political elements, it was immediately apparent that the forces at Visconti Frasca's disposal were insufficient; the two divisions at the Korciano border were not enough; the forces deployed towards the sea were barely sufficient. This plan would have succeeded if, instead of having columns deployed in aadvance that I call lenticular, there had been more compact masses. Eight days ago, to give proof of the optimism that reigned in Albanian circles, General Ranza assured me that by Saturday evening Lanina would be taken (and therefore it was useless to bomb it) and, afterwards, Prevesa, and from there they would march without wasting time in the direction of Athens. All this optimism is completely unfounded, and we have seen from events what the Greeks have done. To this very bleak picture, he added some brushstrokes of optimism: in his opinion, the dynamism of the Greek army had already been exhausted or was running out "due to a lack of momentum and because we have taken steps in recent days to strengthen our forces." He tried to downplay the significance of what had happened: In truth, there was no failure because the Greeks advanced five kilometers, that is, five kilometers towards Korciano, and repelled the Iulia, while we advanced 20-30 kilometers across the Kalamas. We have established bridgeheads here, which we must maintain at all costs in order to resume operations in that sector.The problem today is how and when to resume operations. We cannot begin unless we are almost certain of dealing a significant blow to the Greek army. Apart from the fact that

talking about dealing a 'significant blow' to the Greek army was in itself tantamount to taking for granted that a victory in the short term was no longer conceivable, the task that, towards the end of his speech, he assigned to the Air Force for 'the period of pause' that ground operations would have to undergo in order to strengthen the deployment in Albania clearly shows how much the setback burned him: During this period of pause, the Air Force mustair force must do what others cannot. These incessant bombings must: demonstrate to the Greek people that the support of the British air force is insufficient or non-existent; disrupt civilian life in Greece, spreading panic everywhere. Therefore, you must choose, square kilometer by square kilometer, which parts of Greece to bomb. The whole of Greece, including the islands, has an area of 130,000 square kilometers, of which the area that can be bombed does not exceed 50,000 square kilometers. All urban centers with more than 10,000 inhabitants must be destroyed and razed to the ground. This is a strict order. Of course, in addition to these centers, there must also be military targets; it must be shown that British air support does not exist, or that it is so limited that it cannot prevent this systematic destruction of Greece's urban centers. This will be the second time this has happened in history, because Rome did it first. Nor can we remain silent about the conclusion of the "Duce's" speech. Having outlined the international political situation in Greece in broad strokes, Mussolini concluded that it could not have been more favorable. He then made some statements that he would certainly regret a few days later, but which for us constitute a further element in assessing his state of mind: In conclusion, I believe that the Greek initiative against us has been exhausted or is being exhausted and, in any case, no longer represents a danger to be taken into excessive consideration, for the reasons I have just explained. It is necessary to resume action with an objective that, at first, should be limited to the Preveza-Arta line, but this operation, which must demonstrate that we are the arbiters of the situation, must be carried out, because I cannot tolerate the spread of the belief throughout the world that we have been unable to defeat the Greeks. The discussion that followed mainly concerned technical issues. What interests us most is Badoglio's opening statement, which was firm in form and correct in substance but, in our opinion, weak on a personal level, i.e., not sufficient to explain and justify the attitude of the Chief of Staff during the crucial days between October 13 and 28, his technical endorsement of the Visconti Prasca plan and his acceptance of the 'imperative' nature of the attack on Greece. All in all, all in all, it seems to us to be more than a true indictment, as Badoglio, outside Palazzo Venezia, wanted to present it and as it was presented after the war, a way of covering his back in order to try to avoid, with a sort of call for an accomplice, the storm he felt gathering over his head. These are the marshal's words in their entirety: Allow me, Duce, to tell you something that took place before the preparations we are making now. I have reread the entire diary: on October 14, you brought Roatta and me together here and raised the question of how many troops were needed to attack Greece. Roatta, based on studies carried out by the General Staff, stated that 20 divisions were needed [and three months to get them up and running with all their equipment and services. You approved our point of view and ordered that the relevant measures be taken without delay]. This involved sending another 10 divisions, and there was also talk of sending a High Command and another Army Command. [But then the next day you changed your mind]. On October 15,

you gathered us here again. Also present were Count Ciano, General Soddu, Lieutenant Lacomoni, and General Visconti Prasca. Following the statements made by Count Ciano, Lieutenant Lacomoni, and General Visconti Prasca, you made the decision to attack on October 26, a date which, as is well known, was then moved to October 28. We tried to do everything we could in that time frame. I have made this statement to show that neither the General Staff nor the Royal Army Staff were involved in this organization, which was carried out in a manner clearly contrary to our entire system, which is based on the principle of first preparing well and then daring. [Neither the General Staff nor the Army Staff are therefore responsible for what happened]. Contrary to Mussolini's predictions and expectations, the Greek initiative after November 1 did not peter out at all, and the situation for the Italian armed forces became increasingly difficult, reaching the brink of collapse in the last days of November and the very beginning of December. It was during this period, however, that, thanks to a remarkable organizational effort, it was possible to transfer the forces necessary to stabilize the situation in January to Albania (between October and December, a total of eleven divisions, followed by another ten between January and April, despite the difficulties arising from the demobilization measures of early October and the need to hastily reconstitute the units and the inadequacy of the Albanian ports). and to block the last Greek offensive in February-March. In April, when the Germans attacked Yugoslavia and Greece itself, the Italian army found itself in a position to participate in the operations under conditions that were certainly disadvantageous compared to those enjoyed by its ally (especially due to the different characteristics of the terrain and the poor motorization of the Italian troops), but whatever has been said and written since then, it was certainly not enough to make its contribution an act of looting, while the Germans were able to take advantage of the wear and tear that the Greeks had been subjected to by the Italians in the previous months. However, nothing could now erase, even in part, the negative consequences of the resounding failures of the first few months. The attack on Greece was not only the tomb of the 'parallel war', but also the most serious blow to the prestige of Mussolini and Italy throughout the war: that 'small' and 'primitive' Greece could stand up to and even threaten to defeat Italy was a possibility that no one had ever seriously considered. From that moment on, Italy was considered more than ever by the British and Americans to be the "soft underbelly" of the Axis, the weakest link in the German continental system, which, even in the very difficult conditions in which England found itself, could be broken. As we shall see later, this idea was based largely on misinformation about the internal situation in Italy and an overestimation of the news about the repercussions of the Greek events on the morale and attitude of the Italians towards the regime, according to reports from British and American diplomatic representatives (at the Holy See and in Rome), according to which it would not have been unlikely for Mussolini to be removed from power; However, what gave credence to this idea even at the highest levels was above all the unexpected succession of so many serious defeats suffered by the Italian armed forces on all fronts during those months. Without them, it would be impossible to understand how even a die-hard realist such as Churchill, in mid-December, when Italy's collapse in Greece seemed likely, the Italian fleet had suffered the severe blow of Taranto, and in North AfricaOraziani had been driven out of Egypt, could, in writing to

Roosevelt, hint at the possibility of "breaking Italy" and, ten days later, on December 23, launch his famous "appeal to the Italian people" on Radio London, in which the invitation to surrender, although not directly formulated, was nevertheless the political essence of the whole speech: One man, and one man alone, was determined to plunge Italy... into the vortex of war. And what is Italy's position today?... What difficult choice is now open to the Italians? Their fate is to remain exposed to the blows of the British Empire at sea, in the air and in Africa, and to the vigorous counterattacks of the Greek nation; or to call Attila from the Brenner Pass; his hordes of soldiers hungry for booty, his teams of Gestapo policemen, to occupy Italy, protect it, and keep the Italian people subjugated, for whom the Nazi leader and his followers harbour the most vivid and open contempt that has ever existed between peoples! Italians, this is where one man has led you; one man alone! And that this was not just vague hopes and mere propaganda exploitation of the situation is demonstrated by the fact that for several weeks the Foreign Office considered it possible that the Italians were sounding out the possibility of a separate peace and went so far as to study the possible conditions for an armistice and, in turn, had its minister in Sofia make a cautious "invitation" to the apostolic delegate in that capital. by its minister in Sofia to make a cautious "invitation" to the apostolic delegate in that capital. The same can be said of the American government: in a gesture that many interpreted as encouraging a separate peace and even as a tacit offer of mediation, Ambassador W. Phillips was recalled to Rome, and Roosevelt, in conversation with the apostolic delegate in Washington, went even further. As Monsignor A. Cicognani telegraphed Cardinal Maglione on January 16, 1941, "The President believes that a separate peace is possible for Italy, whose alliance with Germany is unnatural and whose need for expansion and participation in the control of the Suez Canal he recognizes." Nor, with the fading hope that Italy could withdraw from the conflict, did the hope fade that the adventure Mussolini had embarked upon could turn into an opportunity for the British to achieve a decisive victory in the Mediterranean. in March 1941, when the crisis on the Italian side had been overcome, Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff made the mistake of abandoning the offensive in Libya with all available forces in order to transfer part of them to Greece, believing that they had the opportunity to bring about a decisive strategic-political situation in the Balkans. Especially in December and January, rumors and hypotheses of a possible Italian exit from the conflict appeared in the Anglo-American press and in numerous neutral countries with an insistence that explains why, on February 12 in Bordighera, Mussolini, during his first meeting with Franco,Italy from the conflict appeared in the Anglo-American press and in numerous neutral countries with such insistence that it explains why, on February 12 in Bordighera, Mussolini, during his first meeting with Franco and Serrano Suner, felt the need to refer to them himself, calling them "senseless fantasies" and stating that relations between Italy and Germany were, on the contrary, "clear, straightforward, and intimate."3 According to the British representative in Sofia, the starting point for any peace negotiations should have been "the agreement concluded between England and Italy in April 1938." See ADSS, IV, p. 344. On March 1, 1941, Churchill wrote to Roosevelt on this subject: "I must now report to you what we have decided regarding Greece. Although we were undoubtedly tempted to make another push from Benghazi towards Tripoli, and we could still deploy considerable forces in that

direction, we felt it was our duty to side with the Greeks, who have informed us of their decision to resist the German invader even if they are alone. Our generals Wavell and Dill, who accompanied Mr. Eden to Cairo, after thorough discussion with us, believe that we can fight with a good chance of success. Consequently, we are about to transfer most of the Nile Army to Greece and reinforce ourselves as much as possible in the air. Smuts is sending South African troops to the Delta. Mr. President, you can judge these risks for yourself. At this juncture, what Yugoslavia does is decisive. No nation has ever had such a military opportunity. If they were to attack the Italians from behind in Albania, no one can predict what might happen in a few weeks. The whole situation could change, and even Turkey could decide in our favor. There is a feeling that Russia, although mainly driven by fear, could at least give Turkey some assurance that it will not exert pressure in the Caucasus or attack it in the Black Sea. I do not think I need to tell you that the coordinated influence of your ambassadors in Turkey, in Russia, and especially in Yugoslavia, would be of enormous importance at this moment and could, perhaps, even tip the balance in our favor" (see Roosevelt-Churchill, Secret War Correspondence, pp. 159 ff.). The state of these relations could be defined in various ways; of all the possible definitions, however, the one used by Mussolini with the Caudillo was certainly the furthest from the truth. Even with regard to the first statement, the one concerning rumors of a separate peace, although certainly more truthful than the second, not everything was as simple and clear as Mussolini wanted the Spanish to believe, who, moreover, may have known more about the matter than he thought. If, to some extent, we can speak of vague inquiries, not of peace, but with a view to a possible armistice with Greece alone and, moreover, not on the Italian side but, as we shall see, on the German side, these had in fact taken place on Spanish territory. But let us proceed in order. As already mentioned, at first, while waiting to see how things would turn out, the German reactions had been moderate overall, even if, deep down, they were skeptical and concerned. However, a few days were enough to transform this attitude into a state of irritation, impatience, alarm, and a growing desire to clarify relations with Rome once and for all and to "bring it into line." This was all the more so because, while operations in Greece were taking an increasingly negative turn for the Italian forces, Rome tried not to give too much importance to the matter and to behave as Ciano did with von Ribbentrop during their talks on November 3-4 in Schònhof, in the Sudetenland, to finalize the secret protocol for Spain's accession to the Tripartite Pact, i.e., as if nothing had happened. Gobbels' diary is eloquent in this regard. The first critical reference is dated November 1. Faced with the "very modest progress" of the Italians in Greece, the Minister of Propaganda noted: "All things considered, they lack the right spirit." A few days of silence or near silence followed, then, under the date of the 12th (the same day that Hitler issued "Order No. 18" instructing the Wehrmacht to begin preparations to occupy Macedonia and Thrace), the first real outburst: No progress in Greece. Rome, placing too much trust in diplomatic pressure, has prepared the entire operation very sluggishly. Italy is now completely on the defensive. The situation must now be considered very serious from a military point of view. And it is also a problem of crucial importance for us. Shame, shame! After that, until the end of March, there is a succession of outbursts, personal accusations (especially against Ciano, "the person responsible for the whole affair") and collective

accusations, sarcasm that reveals a state of mind characterized not only by concern about the situation created by the Italian initiative, but also by the emergence, under its impetus, of a deep contempt for Italians and a hitherto repressed intolerance of Mussolini's claims to have a supporting role in the war, his own strategy, and a position equal to that of Hitler. Among the many quotes that could be cited, we will limit ourselves to a few of the most significant and characteristic ones: November 16: The Italians repel a Greek attack on Albanian territory. What humiliation and ignominy! The Taranto affair continues to loom large in the British victory bulletins. November 2: Now the Italians have evacuated Coriza... They continue to ruin our positions. What fine allies we have gone and found ourselves! November 26 The Italians cannot even hold their new positions in Albania... Our allies turn on their heels and run away. A shameful spectacle. December 4: Lunchtime with the Führer... Harsh criticism of the Italians' military conduct in Albania, which is turning Rome into a laughing stock... But perhaps that is not a bad thing from our point of view. It enables us to refute the legend that Italy played an almost equal part to ours in defeating France, which was, of course, very far from the truth. The Führer states that Italy would have suffered a heavy defeat in North Africa if it had had to attack France there. But now there can be no doubt as to who should lead Europe, Hitler or Mussolini. December 5 The Italians are retreating further on the Greek front. It's shameful. Mussolini's prestige has suffered terribly. The Italians are at their lowest ebb in terms of world opinion. And our standing has risen even higher. December 11 Italian losses are estimated at around ten thousand dead. No one now wants to take responsibility for this. Ciano is trying to shift the blame onto Badoglio, and Badoglio insists that he was not consulted. A frightening orgy of amateurism. December 22 Unparalleled amateurism. The Führer has some harsh words to say on the subject. The Italians have ruined the entire military prestige of the Axis. That is why the Balkan states are so stubborn. The Italians, after all, are a neo-Latin race. Now we will have to attack. Not to help the Italians, but to drive out the British, who have now settled in Crete. They must be thrown off the island. The Führer would prefer to see peace restored between Rome and Athens, but how can we tell the Italians? Mussolini is now completely bogged down in this mess. J. Goebbels, Diaries 1939-1941, cit. pp. 217, 226, 229, 236, 238, 246, 263, 282, 308, 326, 351, 432. February Fierce fighting in Albania. In Abyssinia, the situation is becoming very serious for Rome, and in Libya it is rather catastrophic. No good news. Reports from Italy speak of the blackest defeatism. These days, the Führer is the fascists' only hope. Ciano is completely finished, and the Duce's popularity is approaching zero. Added to this are disorganization, corruption, in short, a state of affairs bordering on chaos. We will have to take action soon, or Italy will end up in nothingness. March Italy boasts in Popolo d'Italia and announces that our troops have occupied Bulgaria. Another provocative indiscretion. We immediately publish a special statement: inviolability of Bulgarian neutrality, full consent of Sofia, protection of its national sovereignty. The Italians are unparalleled in their shamelessness. They are trying to steal our resounding successes. March The Italians are not eager to go on the offensive after all. A bunch of lazy cowards! March In Albania, the Italians are still waiting for us to pull their chestnuts out of the fire for them. 1April Italy is becoming our Achilles' heel. But there is nothing we can do about it. We will have to try to erase its defeats with our victories. In this climate, the first signs of

Berlin's desire to put relations with Rome on a new footing came during Ciano's trip to Germany at the end of the second decade of November to meet with von Ribbentrop Serrano Suner and participate in the signing of Hungary's accession to the Tripartite Pact.Hungary to the Tripartite Pact. On that occasion, Ciano had two extremely awkward meetings with Hitler on November 18 and 20. The foreign minister sent Mussolini a rather sugar-coated account of the first meeting, focusing on three key points. Hitler had "shown himself to be particularly anxious to find military measures to deal with the situation," but had given him the impression that he did not attach great importance "to what had happened so far" and that he was looking at "the problem in the broader context of the European conflict.". Furthermore, the Führer had been very pleased with his "unexpected" agreement in principle to a deal with Yugoslavia, which Hitler considered essential for future developments and which, in his view, should be based on three points: "Axis guarantees for Yugoslav borders; the transfer of Thessaloniki to Yugoslavia; demilitarization of the Adriatic by Yugoslavia." As if to console him and make up for this "concession" made to the Germans, in the last part of the report Ciano hastened to inform Mussolini of the more than favorable impression that Ribbentrop and their entourage had made on Hitler Ribbentrop and their entourage had been made by the "Duce" that same morning to the provincial party hierarchy summoned to Palazzo Venezia to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the sanctions, in which Mussolini had particularly emphasized the "comradely" and "totalitarian" nature of Italian-German collaboration, on the "identity of views" between him and Hitler, and on his willingness and confidence to "break Greece's back" ("in two or twelve months, it matters little"). In his diary, however, Ciano paints a much darker picture of the conversation: The atmosphere is heavy. Hitler is pessimistic and considers the situation to be greatly compromised by what has happened in the Balkans. His criticisms are open, sharp, definitive. I try to argue with him, but he won't let me continue. Only in the second part of the conversation, when he agreed to possible negotiations with Yugoslavia, did he become warm and cordial, at times almost friendly. The atmosphere of the conversation is even heavier in the German minutes, which show Ciano trying in vain to reduce the Greek affair to "a tactical error in the conduct of the Italian attack" and, at the same time, clings, as if to a lifeline, to the idea of an agreement with Yugoslavia in order to appease Hitler, even though he understands the full significance of capitulation that this would have for Italy and Mussolini. Despite Ciano's compliance and his insistence in presenting the situation on the Greek-Albanian front as now heading towards a clear improvement, the two talks with the Italian Foreign Minister did not alter Hitler's conviction that, in order to avoid the risk of further setbacks and complications, in order to remedy the military and political situation created by the Italians and to be able to devote the maximum German effort to the now practically decided and increasingly urgent (after the failure of the talks a few days earlier with Molotov, on which the Greek affair had not failed to have an influence) action against the Soviet Union, it was absolutely necessary to bring Italy into line once and for all. And in fact, on November 20, as Ciano was about to return to Rome, Hitler entrusted him with a personal letter for Mussolini which, given its importance, is worth quoting in full. Few, if any, of the letters exchanged between the two political leaders during the war are as interesting for understanding both the personal

relationship between them and the state of relations between Germany and Italy, which, at that moment, above all, at a decisive turning point, and, finally, the impact of individual events on them. The last part of the letter, dedicated to "military measures," is particularly significant in this regard, from which it is clear that Hitler did not foresee the imminent collapse of the front in North Africa and must have believed that, on the Greek-Albanian front, while no success could be expected for at least three months, until the Italian forces on the ground were strong enough to take the initiative in operations, neither could a further deterioration of the situation be expected. This is precisely what happened a few days later, in such dramatic terms that it shattered the last German illusions and made it increasingly urgent and radical in their eyes to reestablish their relations with Italy on a new basisItaly. Although deferential and friendly in form, and even though Hitler made a show of wanting to discuss in writing with Mussolini the conclusions he had already reached, the letter1 was in essence very harsh: the countermeasures "suggested" in it were in fact presented by the Führer without euphemisms as "absolutely necessary," that is, to be accepted and carried out without any discussion: Vienna, November 20, 1940 Duce, Allow me to begin this letter by assuring you that my heart and my thoughts have been with you more than ever in the last 15 days. Please take note of this, Duce: that I am determined to do everything that, in the current situation, can be of relief to you. When I asked you to receive me in Florence, I began the journey in the hope of being able to explain my thoughts to you before the threatening controversy with Greece began, of which I had only heard in general terms. First of all, I wanted to ask you to postpone action for a while, if possible until a more favorable season, in which case, however, until after the election of the American president. In any case, I wanted to ask you, Duce, not to take this action without first occupying Crete in a lightning strike; To this end, I also wanted to bring you practical proposals regarding the use of a German paratrooper division and another airborne infantry division. The situation that has arisen has very serious psychological and military consequences, which it is important to shed light on. I will report on the individual circumstances, because from them, in my opinion, the countermeasures that are absolutely necessary can be deduced. Psychological consequences: The psychological consequence of the situation is unfortunate in that it weighs unfavorably on the diplomatic preparations that are in full swing. In general, we feel the consequences in the form of a strengthening of the tendency not to commit prematurely to our side in the conflict, but rather to wait for further developments. Bulgaria, which already showed little desire to join the Tripartite Pact, is now completely averse to even considering such a step. Even with regard to Russia, it is more difficult to reconcile interests and divert Russian ambitions towards the East. Mr. Molotov, on the contrary, showed signs of increasing interest in the Balkans. For the time being, it is impossible to ascertain the impression this has made in Yugoslavia. But even in France, there is undoubtedly a strengthening of, on the contrary, hinted at a growing interest in the Balkans. For the time being, it is impossible to ascertain the impression this has made in Yugoslavia. But even in France, there is undoubtedly a strengthening of the position of those who urge caution and assure us that perhaps the last word has not yet been said in this war. Whatever the psychological consequences of this may be, what matters is that it does not hinder our further operations, and, in particular, that no unfriendly positions are taken by

those powers which, like Yugoslavia, could provoke, if not a catastrophe, at least an unpleasant extension of the conflict. Of particular importance is the attitude of Turkey, because its stance will also have a decisive influence on the attitude of Bulgaria. Military consequences: The military consequences of this situation, Duce, are very serious. England will thus gain a number of air bases that will bring it not only into the immediate vicinity of the Ploesti oil basin, but also into the direct vicinity of the whole of southern Italy and especially the ports of embarkation and disembarkation of both the Italian mainland and Albania. Whereas, until now, the Romanian oil field was completely out of reach of British bombers, they are now less than 500 km away. I dare not even think about the consequences that would ensue. Now, Duce, we must be clear on one point, namely that there is no real protection for an oil field. Even our own anti-aircraft artillery can, with its fire, endanger such an area as much as the attacking enemy. If large oil refineries were to be destroyed, the damage would be irreparable. Southern Italy, its ports, as well as the whole of Albania, are now located within easy reach of British bombers. It is clear that England is completely indifferent to Italy destroying Greek cities in its retaliatory attacks. It is the attack on Italian cities that will be decisive. In this regard, I consider a ground offensive, starting from Albanian territory, against the new British strongholds before the beginning of March to be completely futile. The destruction of British air bases by air attacks is, based on experience gained so far in aerial warfare, equally out of the question. It is easier to destroy anything else than airfields. The fact is, therefore, that England has, as I feared, now occupied Crete, is in the process of gaining a foothold on a large number of other islands, and is also establishing air bases in a whole series of Greek locations. Among these are two near Thessaloniki and two others presumably in Thrace. Rhodes is now also within reach of large British fighter planes, and if, as it seems, the British establish air bases in western Greece as well, all the coastal locations of southern Italy will also be seriously threatened. From a military point of view, this situation is a threat. From an economic point of view, as far as the Romanian oil zone is concerned, it is downright frightening. As a remedy, I therefore propose the following measures: Political measures: Spain must be induced to enter the war immediately. It can be assumed that this should happen as soon as possible, in about six weeks. Spanish intervention must serve to remove Gibraltar and block the strait, to transport at least one or two German divisions to Spanish Morocco in order to protect ourselves against a possible defection from France by French Morocco and North Africa; since such a defection, Duce, would provide the Anglo-French air force with launch areas that would be catastrophic for the whole of Italy, which must be avoided and cannot be left to chance or even to hope. With the fall of Gibraltar, on the other hand, the Mediterranean would be locked down on the western side. England would then be forced to send all its transports around South Africa. This would relieve pressure on the eastern Mediterranean, and French North Africa would most certainly remain under Pétain's government. Every effort must now be made to remove Russia from the Balkans and turn it towards the East. We must try to reach some kind of agreement with Turkey to relieve Bulgaria of Turkish pressure. Yugoslavia must be persuaded to remain neutral and, when possible, to cooperate with us in resolving the Greek question. Without security from Yugoslavia, there is no point in risking any operation in the Balkans that could promise success. Hungary must allow the

immediate transport of large German formations to Romania. Romania must accept this increase in German armed forces, in the interests of its own protection. I am determined, Duce, to oppose with decisive force any attempt by the British to establish a real position in Thrace, whatever the risk. However, I am unfortunately forced to note that it is impossible to wage war in the Balkans before March. Therefore, any pressure or threat on Yugoslavia would be futile, since the Serbian General Staff knows perfectly well that the practical implementation of such a threat before March is impossible. We must therefore win over Yugoslavia, if possible, by other means and methods. Military measures: The most important military measure seems to me to be, first and foremost, the blockade of the Mediterranean. To this end, I want to try, as I already said in point 1, to induce Spain to intervene promptly in the conflict, in order to close the western passage in the meantime. Now, Duce, I consider it necessary that you also attempt to reach Marsa Matruh, when preparations allow, in order to establish an air base there, which will make it possible to drive the British fleet out of Alexandria once and for all with the Picchiatelli; then to infest the Suez Canal with mines using long-range bombers, so as to make it practically impossible to carry out effective traffic. I also consider it necessary to proceed with a very strong and systematic concentration of our air fleets and to unite them in terms of the targets to be bombed. The current war has proven beyond doubt that attacks on civilian locations are of no importance. Only attacks on important military or economic positions promise success. However, the most important goal in the Mediterranean is first and foremost to flush the British fleet out of its hiding places. In my opinion, our collective attack should be focused on this, while continuing to provide direct support to the troops operating in Albania. We must begin uninterrupted surveillance and continuous attacks on all ships sailing in the Mediterranean under the enemy flag. That this is possible, Duce, is proven by our struggle in the North Sea, where British ships dare to transit only under the protection of coastal destroyers. To this end, I therefore propose, Duce, that you recall the Italian Armed Forces stationed for us in the West, except for the submarines, whose effectiveness is constantly increasing, and to deploy them in the most important sector. These Armed Forces are now in the English Channel sector, in the most unfavorable season, and are suffering from climatic conditions that are just as harsh for them as the southern climates would be for us in summer. In any case, I am of the opinion that the Mediterranean question must be settled during this winter, because it is precisely in this season that the use of German armed forces is most appropriate, while, on the contrary, the use of Italian armed forces in Western or Northern Europe at this time of year seems impractical for climatic reasons. However, I would like to have my German armed forces back in the spring and at the latest by the beginning of May; as this will also be the right moment for our action. For the collaboration of our air force in the Mediterranean, I would first like to commit a squadron of Ju 88s, with the necessary reconnaissance equipment, large fighters, etc. I have not yet discussed the details of this matter with the Reich Marshal and would therefore leave it to him to definitively determine the contingents he deems necessary. This would give us, Duce, two large areas of air operations in the Mediterranean sector: the Italian area, which essentially dominates the Italian-Albanian-Greek skies, as well as the Egyptian sector, and a German sector of operations which, thanks to our long-range bombers, would primarily cover the

eastern Mediterranean. With the skillful use of our air forces, in three or four months the Mediterranean will become the grave of the British fleet, and this is the decisive prerequisite for military operations which, in my opinion, cannot begin before the beginning of March as far as Greece itself is concerned. I consider this time frame necessary for the simple fact that it would not be possible for me to concentrate in Romania before that date the forces that would ensure unequivocal success in every way. Even the gathering of sufficient Italian forces in Albania will take at least three months. Only then can success be expected in the shortest possible time. For now, the question of Egypt can remain completely open; after careful consideration, I am convinced that an attack on the Nile delta will not be possible before the autumn of next year. The most important thing, in my opinion, is to gain a position near after careful consideration, I am convinced that an attack on the Nile delta will not be possible before the fall of next year. The most important thing seems to me to be to conquer a position near Marsa Matruh, from which we can attack the British fleet in Alexandria with dive bombers protected by fighters. But even from a psychological point of view, such measures are likely to bring relief and create a positive atmosphere once again with regard to the Axis. These, Duce, are the thoughts I communicate to you with the warmest cordiality of a friend who is ready to help you with the greatest fanaticism so that you may overcome the crisis as quickly as possible, and so that an apparent failure may be transformed into a situation that will force the enemy into definitive defeat. With warmest regards and feelings of loyal camaraderie. Yours, A. Hitler According to Ciano's diary, the letter did not have a particular effect on Mussolini: I expected a violent reaction from Mussolini. He seems to attach no importance to a document that is of great importance. This, at least, was the case at first. The next day, however, he reread it and, probably concerned by the news coming from Albania, which, contrary to the relatively reassuring news he had when Ciano delivered it to him, suggested that a new retreat of the front and the evacuation of Koriza were imminent, he began to understand its true meaning and commented on it to his son-in-law, saying: "He has given me the ruler on my fingers." And he hastened to write a short and somewhat pathetic letter to Hitler, in the first half of which he tried in vain to find justifications for what had happened and to show confidence in the future: I am deeply sorry that my letter dated October 19, nine days before the outbreak of hostilities, did not reach you in time for me to be able to express your opinion, which I would naturally have considered in all its importance. After a promising and rapid start, the march of Italian troops in Greece came to a halt and allowed the Greeks to take theinitiative for the following reasons: a veritable deluge that irreparably blocked the armored division that was about to break through to Janina with torrents of mud; the almost total defection of the Albanian troops, who threw down their arms or defected en masse to the enemy. The Command had to gather and disarm some seven thousand Albanian soldiers; the attitude of Bulgaria, which allowed Greece to withdraw almost all of the eight divisions it had in Thrace and deploy them all against the nine Italian divisions, weakened by the defection of the Albanian elements. All this is now in the past. I am naturally aware of the unfavorable psychological repercussions that these events have caused, but I think they are temporary phenomena. I am preparing a sufficient number of divisions (thirty) to annihilate Greece, and I have no concerns about

the bombing of southern cities, where there are no important industrial complexes. In the second part, however, he accepted all of Hitler's demands, both to meet with Franco to convince him to join the Axis and to be "ready to guarantee the current Yugoslav borders and recognize Thessaloniki as part of Yugoslavia.". In this regard, he did set three conditions: that Yugoslavia join the Tripartite Pact, that it demilitarize the Adriatic (but this was a condition in name only, since, as we have seen, it had already been stipulated by Hitler himself in his conversation with Ciano), and that its military intervention take place "only after Greece has received a first blow from Italy."; but their value was immediately nullified by his placing the entire management of the Yugoslav operation in Hitler's hands. So much so that when, during the German-Yugoslav negotiations, Belgrade dug its heels in on the issue of the requested demilitarization of the Adriatic, Rome let Berlin know2 that this was not an "absolute" condition for Italy. Hitler's reply to this letter arrived in Rome on December 6, brought by Luftwaffe Marshal E. Milch, who had come to convey and finalize the "proposals" put forward by the Führer in his previous letter to Mussolini regarding Germany's air contribution to the war in the Mediterranean. Dated December 4, but certainly written earlier, when news from the Greek-Albanian front was available-Albanian front, which suggested that the situation was consolidating in favor of the Italians, while in fact, at the very moment Hitler was writing it, they were suffering the most dramatic collapse of the entire campaign. It presents only two points of real interest, where Hitler strongly urged Mussolini to contact Franco ("I therefore propose that you make a new, urgent request to Franco today to finally set a fixed date for his entry into the war, so that the relevant military preparations can begin") and made it clear that he wanted to meet with him "to discuss in person issues that are too long to deal with in writing.". Apart from these requests, the tone was, as Ciano was quick to note, more relaxed than the previous one. But, given what was happening in Albania and Rome, this now meant little or nothing. As with other historical figures, when talking about Mussolini, it has become common practice to refer to certain events and dates to indicate the decisive moments and turning points in his life and political career. Among these moments and turning points is the war in Greece, which, however, almost certainly because of the impact it had on the moral life of Italians and continues to have on their historical memory, is seen as a whole. This is correct in a general sense, but insufficient both for those who want to reconstruct Mussolini's biography and for those who want to study the events of Italy's participation in World War II in depth. In both cases, in fact, there is a need to clarify the reference point, to try to identify as accurately as possible the moment when the war in Greece took on the significance of a decisive turning point that is rightly attributed to it. In our opinion, this moment was during the first half of December 1940. It was during these days, in fact, that the most traumatic military events took place and, in their wake, some political events that were perhaps not very important in themselves, but decisive in their consequences for Italian-German relations-German relations in the weeks that followed. In the second half of November, the situation on the Greek-Albanian front had been extremely difficult, as has been said, but neither Mussolini nor the Supreme Command had considered it possible until the end of the month that it could collapse at any moment, and there was even hope that it would consolidate. On November 21, Mussolini appeared to Ciano, who had just returned

from Germany, to be"serene, determined, and unconcerned." According to Ciano, who was not much of a psychologist, the progress of operations saddened him but did not upset him. Only a few days later, speaking to Teruzzi, he said, "I can see that you are surprised to find me so calm. But I am more than calm. I am glacial, like someone standing before the gallows." The real knot to untangle was, for him and, we believe, sincerely, even if, of course, he was also driven by the desire (whether conscious or not is difficult to say) to find a scapegoat on whom to place his own responsibilities, that of the military leaders against whom, and especially against Badoglio, his polemic and resentment had grown and continued to grow day by day. "He is polemical against the military, against Badoglio, and announces an imminent change of guard," noted Ciano, also on the 21st, who, for his part, given his father-in-law's state of mind, must have thought it wise to support him, so as to shift his own responsibilities onto Badoglio. This was all the more so because there were those in the more strictly Fascist leadership, such as Pavolini, Serena, and above all Farinacci, who directly or indirectly pushed him in this direction. Badoglio, for his part, added fuel to the fire by multiplying his criticism of the "Duce" around town and even with Keitel, blaming him for what was happening. At first, when he believed that the operations against Greece would be quick and victorious, it cannot be ruled out that Mussolini had thought of taking over the Supreme Command himself. Absurd as it was, this idea should not be too surprising. At its root was something more than Mussolini's contempt and distrust of the military and his egocentrism: it was the maturing of the conviction we have already mentioned in the previous volume, which would translate in two or three months' time into the decision to send most of his ministers to the front in order to experiment with "governing with general managers alone." He believed that for the future of the regime, it was necessary to remove the "administration" from the control of "politicians" and entrust it to the management of "bureaucrats" under his direction'. As we shall see later, Mussolini's idea, as far as its translation into political and constitutional terms was concerned, was to transform the government into a body of technicians and bureaucrats under the direction of a 'political' prime minister whose main function, on the one hand, would be to coordinate the activities of the various ministries (there was even talk of formally changing the term 'minister' to 'secretary general') and, on the other hand, liaising with him, who, having left the office of head of government, would have only that of 'Duce' above all others. Amedeo Giannini was working on a law ("del Duce") inspired by these principles in October-November, while it seems that the task of studying the constitutional reform in which to insert it had been entrusted to Santi Romano. In the military field, Mussolini had always favored military ministers (i.e., undersecretaries, since he was generally the head of the ministries, including the War Ministry) over the chief of staff (whom he considered nothing more than his technical advisor). the military ministers, i.e., in practice, the undersecretaries, as he was generally the head of the ministries, including the Ministry of War. He had also significantly tended to combine the offices of undersecretary and chief of staff in a single person, which was another way of increasing "bureaucratic" power over "political" power. After Italy entered the war, this line of behavior became even more pronounced. Among the many facts that could be recalled, we will limit ourselves to just two: the failure to replace Graziani as chief of staff of the army when, after Balbo's death, the

marshal was sent to command the forces in North Africa, and the increasingly important role assumed by the undersecretary of war and deputy chief of staff Soddu. After the operations against Greece had taken such a negative turn, however, it became impossible for Mussolini to personally take Badoglio's place. It would have meant provoking a reaction in the armed forces, which were already far from benevolent towards him, and not only in them, which the "Duce" could not afford at that moment and whose repercussions on the sovereign he could not predict, not to mention the risk to his prestige if he personally took command of the armed forces in those circumstances. Nor could Mussolini at that moment consider resorting to the expedient of not appointing a successor to Badoglio as chief of staff and managing the position through a suitably chosen deputy. It was impossible to keep Soddu, who was engaged in Albania, in his post, as he was too unpopular with his colleagues, considered by many to be one of those responsible for the situation that had arisen with the attack on Greece, and about whom even Mussolini was beginning to have reservations. This operation would also have been difficult to carry out and not without risk, given that it would certainly not have met with approval in the country, and would have caused strong and lively divisions and conflicts within the party, which would have taken their toll on his already shaken personal prestige, not to mention the hostility he would have encountered in military circles. So we would not even have mentioned it if Badoglio, in a last-ditch attempt to prevent Mussolini from replacing him with a general outside his "party" and to keep the door open for a return to the leadership of the Supreme Command, had not tried to launch it. As we shall see, Badoglio, despite having repeatedly stated to his loyalists that he could no longer tolerate Mussolini's interference and incompetence in military matters and that, moreover, he was in poor health and therefore wished to resign, when he was sure that the 'Duce' wanted to get rid of him, did not fail, in Caviglia's words, to behave like "a cunning peasant," maneuvering to avoid being dismissed or, at least, to leave the door open behind him so that he could return to his position sooner or later. Although Mussolini had been considering it for some time, he had to make the actual decision to remove Badoglio from the Supreme Command only after Ciano's return from Germany and the reading of Hitler's letter of November 20. Two pieces of news contributed greatly to his decision to break the deadlock, one reported to him by Ciano, the other either by Ciano himself or received directly or indirectly from the marshal's entourage. Both referred to the meeting Badoglio had had on November 14-15 in Innsbruck with Keitel to examine the general military situation, particularly in the Mediterranean. During these talks, Badoglio had not failed, as already mentioned, to tell his German colleague that he had been opposed to the expedition against Greece, that he had judged the forces to be insufficient and that he "had foreseen everything that had then happened," which was immediately reported to Ambassador von Mackensen, who in turn reported it to Ciano, irritating and dissatisfying his interlocutors. Mussolini certainly could not tolerate such behavior from Badoglio, who was revealing his feelings to the Germans and could lead them to believe that he no longer even had theauthority to get rid of such a collaborator, especially since the anti-Badoglio wave was beginning to rise in the party, and with it the anti-Ciano wave, which Mussolini could not accept either. He was convinced that the foreign minister bore very serious responsibility, but for him the two cases were very different. Not

only because Ciano was his son-in-law, and Edda, his favorite daughter, defended him tooth and nail, and was the son of one of the few men he had truly respected and for whom he had felt genuine friendship, but because, while Badoglio was a representative of the "old regime," of the "military caste," a man of the king, who had served the regime out of opportunism and self-interest, reaping all the honors and benefits possible, Ciano was instead a product of fascism and had been elevated to the top of the regime's hierarchy by him, who had made him his "heir apparent." '. This alone was enough to make the two cases profoundly different in his eyes: for political reasons, to preserve a certain fascist image, to avoid admitting that he could have been wrong and exposing himself to accusations of nepotism and, finally, as Bastianini, who knew his psychology well, astutely noted, "out of a spirit of controversy, in contrast to the outside world, and all the more so if it was pressing for his defenestration," Ciano could not be placed on the same level as Badoglio. Finally, another reason why, if Badoglio's head had to roll, Ciano's should not: Ciano was much more unpopular with the Germans than Badoglio. Mussolini could and should give them one satisfaction, but two would have been too many and would have damaged his already precarious prestige with them. The spearheads of the controversy against Badoglio in the PNF were the party secretary, Adelchi Serena, who succeeded Muti on October 30, and above all Farinacci, who had already raised the issue on November 9 in a letter to Mussolini that was a veritable indictment of Badoglio. In it, Farinacci, after reviewing the main stages of the marshal's military and political career from Caporetto onwards, had asked in no uncertain terms for his dismissal and, broadening the discussion, had argued that, "in your interest and that of fascism, and above all of Italy," the "supreme necessity" was to "liquidate the entire past by removing those military leaders," and here he explicitly named Oraziani, "who no longer enjoy the trust not only of the country but also of the army." We do not know what Mussolini's reaction was; what is certain is that, after reading the letter, he summoned Farinacci to Palazzo Venezia for the 12th. Mussolini probably did not go too far, but he had to give Farinacci the impression that, by now, it would take very little to induce him to break the deadlock and that, all things considered, help in this regard from outside would not be unwelcome. This would explain both the urgency with which Farinacci, five days later, sent him a memorandum, which he wrote had been obtained from "a dear friend of mine, commander of a large unit," which was a new and more technical indictment of the military hierarchies of both the Army and the Navy (for the Taranto affair), and the publication, on November 19, in Il regime fascista, of a first veiled critical reference to the military management of the war against Greece. Four days later, again in Farinacci's newspaper, an article appeared in which Badoglio was directly accused of "imprudence and untimeliness": Mussolini has proclaimed that modern Carthage will be defeated and that Greece will end up with its kidneys broken. We are certain that all this will come to pass, even if some improvidence and untimeliness on the part of the General Staff Command has allowed Churchill to have a foolish diversion. It is unlikely that thearticle had been agreed upon, as was claimed by many, including Badoglio himself, between Mussolini and Farinacci. This seems to be proven by the fact that, a few days after its publication, Mussolini let Farinacci know through Pavolini that it had not made a good impression in Roman political circles and, above all, by a passage from the letter that Farinacci wrote to

Mussolini on November 28 to refute it: I apologize for causing you this trouble, but my conscience is clear. When they deliberately wanted to pin the blame for the Greek failure on the Political Command, and when people in Italy were already beginning to discuss it, albeit cautiously, my Duce, I felt the need to take a stance that completely changed public opinion. The available information on Serena's role is less precise. What can be gleaned from it is that the party faction made itself heard mainly after the publication of the second article in 'Il regime fascista' and immediately after Badoglio's dismissal, through a series of central and peripheral initiatives aimed at attributing all responsibility for the situation in Greece to Badoglio and supporting the need and opportunity for his removal. At least initially, because I thought: "but I didn't want to." They would have praised the "infallible technician" and not the "politician" or whoever the hell I know! So what? Where is the "character," that infamous "character" that everyone talks about and proclaims in every tone... but only for others and never for themselves? Yes, lack of foresight and untimeliness, no doubt about it. Sacrosanct truth. Whose fault is it? The expert's, the technician's. Otherwise, what use are they? For decoration? For choreography? To make "plans" to be filed away when it comes time to implement them, only because they are deemed unfeasible by the first archbishop who has never led anything but seminarians in his life? No, dear Conticelli, we might as well abolish and bury these infamous technicians! x Has it been established that the cause of what happened was due to what Farinacci said? Has it been established that if he had 'organized' and 'prepared' himself, if he had chosen the 'right direction, the most logical and intuitive one', if he had waited for good weather, i.e., taken the field at the right moment, there would have been a 90% chance that the troubles that occurred would not have happened? Who should take care of all this? The Holy See, perhaps? The political bodies? Come on, isn't all this at least childish? If the General Staff, albeit reluctantly as they say, agreed and gave the go-ahead, it is a sign that it approved, and if it gave the "go-ahead," it is a sign that it was present and fully functional, and if it was present and functional, it is a sign that from that moment on it assumed full and legal responsibility for what it ordered. I do not know how things went, nor do I care. However, I say and maintain, and will always say and maintain, that it is at least a little too convenient, if what is said in Rome is true, to blame third parties, crying out against imposition; that it is too convenient (again, if what is said is true) to resign over a11 sentence that has the courage to tell the truth', when, on the other hand, no one felt the moral duty to resign (I repeat, if what everyone says is true) when there was a difference of opinion with the political side, or when there was imposition. But I see even further. Let's do away with insinuations. Even if there had been an explicit order from the Head of Government, which I would find hard to believe even if I saw it in writing (because with the Duce, for Spain, I had the honor of dealing directly with him on military matters) in moments like these, never, ever should His Majesty the General allow the rumor to take hold that the responsibility lies beyond His Majesty himself. The Duce is the Regime; the Regime is the Fatherland: the Fatherland is honor. The Duce is sacred and inviolable like the Majesty of the King. He cannot be touched or even brushed against. There are a thousandThere are a thousand generals, but there is only one Mussolini. And that is enough." Under the date of December 8, 1940, Egidio Ortona reports in his diary a conversation with Camillo Pellizzi: "The Party has given orders to criticize and accuse

Badoglio's actions and attitude through its widespread organs. The Party secretary himself, summoning the, including himself, attempted a speech in which he clearly accused the marshal, calling him Signor Badoglio and declaring that he had clearly given his consent to the operations in Greece. This is attested to by the minutes of the Supreme Command meeting ("which one day will have to be published"). It appears to me that it was the Duce who was most concerned, asking questions and raising issues" (in the Ortona Archive). References to thePNF's action against Badoglio can also be found in Q. Armellini, Diario di guerra cit., pp. 176 and 192 ff. Despite the doubts and criticism it aroused at a later stage, the campaign against Badoglio became harsher, to the point of accusing him of outright treason and, in some cases, rummaging through his private life. When the article appeared in "Il regime fascista" (The Fascist Regime), which precipitated the crisis, Mussolini still had no idea who could succeed Badoglio and Soddu, and he had not even decided whether or not to continue to assign the positions of Undersecretary of War and Deputy Chief of Staff to a single person. Ciano wrote in his diary on November 23: Sebastiani confided to me this morning that the Duce is studying the Military Yearbook for names to replace Badoglio and Soddu. He seems to have settled on Pintor and Orlando... He says nothing to me. More precise, under the same date, is General Armellini (who got the news from Badoglio, with whom the Duce had spoken the day before about Soddu's succession) states in his diary that Mussolini intended to appoint General Pintor as Undersecretary of War. This may suggest that, if the Duce had thought of General Orlando, he had thought of him as Deputy Chief of Staff. However, this is irrelevant, as the name of General Taddeo Orlando immediately disappeared from the list of possible candidates. Other names, however, would come to the fore in the following days alongside that of General Pietro Pintor: those of Gazzera, Cavallero, Guzzoni, and Monti. The first two as possible chiefs of staff (but at first Mussolini must have thought of them as deputy chiefs), the latter two as possible undersecretaries. In some circles, the names of Graziani and De Bono were also mentioned as possible successors to Badoglio (more than a candidacy, however, this was a self-candidacy), but both were unpopular with Mussolini, and Messe was mentioned as a possible successor to Soddu. Politically, however, the game would be played around two names, Pintor and Cavallero, who, apart from their personal abilities and moral standing, represented two clearly identified and opposing tendencies within the military establishment: Pintor represented the Badoglian and 'apolitical' tendency, while Cavallero represented the anti-Badoglian, innovative tendency, more closely linked to the diverse world of the regime's leadership. On the morning of November 24, Badoglio learned of the previous day's article in Il regime fascista and, realizing the danger looming over him, decided to countermaneuver by going on the offensive. In the afternoon, he sent a letter to Mussolini asking that Farinacci's newspaper be 'fully, completely, and exhaustively' silenced., Badoglio decided to countermaneuver by going on the offensive. In the afternoon, he sent Mussolini a letter asking that Farinacci's newspaper make a "full, complete, and exhaustive" retraction of what had been written, failing which he would resign. The next morning, he reported to the newspaper, bringing with him the text of the correction that Il regime fascista was to publish. As soon as he hadraised the issue, however, Mussolini interrupted him, saying that it deserved to be examined calmly and that he should therefore return in the afternoon. It is

not clear what the two said to each other during that conversation. Mussolini never spoke or wrote about it. Ciano's diary is extremely vague: The Badoglio crisis is underway. Badoglio demands a denial from Farinacci, written in such terms that I am certain he would rather put dynamite under the newspaper's printing presses than accept it. Badoglio confirms that if the denial is not published, he will leave. He adds the only interesting piece of news, because it suggests that Mussolini, realizing that Badoglio did not want to resign but only to exploit Farinacci's attack to gather as much solidarity as possible around him in the name of the army's image in the country, did not want to rush things, letting the marshal liquidate himself with his own hands: Mussolini now wants to get rid of him, but he is taking it slowly because that is his nature in such matters and because he wants to give time to time. According to Badoglio's notes in the Diario storico del Comando supremo (Historical Diary of the Supreme Command), Mussolini expressed his regret at the rumors that 'my opposition to the campaign against Greece would be made public' and that any decision would be postponed until the following day. General Armellini, one of the marshal's most loyal followers and the recipient of his unconditional trust, provides more details, but gives two significantly different versions. The first, based on what Lieutenant Colonel Valenzano, the marshal's nephew and private secretary, told him by telephone on the evening of the 25th, according to which the matter would be settled the next day "in the presence of the author of the article," but that "he was inclined towards an adjustment." The second, based on what Badoglio himself told him the next day, according to which Mussolini first tried to minimize the episode, then complained "that people outside knew and were talking aboutBadoglio's opposition to the war against Greece'. The Marshal, again according to Armellini, then clearly understood and there could be no doubt that the article had been inspired by the Duce and was his response to the Marshal's outburst at the meeting on the current day: the Duce, as Soddu says, cannot be opposed! In the morning, therefore, he submitted his resignation, citing a lack of mutual trust, a condition essential for productive work between subordinate and superior. According to Badoglio, upon receiving the letter of resignation, Mussolini asked the Marshal for 24 hours to decide, and the latter replied that "I have no objection and I ask you to consider my resignation irrevocable." Armellini makes no mention of this exchange, which Badoglio reports under the date of November 26 in his historical diary, and his notes under the dates of November 26 and the following days until December 2 denote a growing nervousness, revealing at least part of the action taken in those days by Badoglio's group in support of the marshal and, finally, allow us to understand the essential elements of the counter-maneuver attempted by Badoglio. On the 27th, since the "Duce" had not yet made his decision known, Badoglio must have thought he could force the situation. Armellini's diary tends to lend credence to thethe image of an elusive Mussolini, almost eager to close the matter as if nothing had happened and who, in the event that he had to replace Badoglio, thought of General Pintor: Pintor is fine, replied Badoglio, but as deputy chief out of respect for Graziani, Marshal and Chief of Staff of the Royal Army. Leave the position of Chief open and take Pintor as Deputy Chief. In any case, I don't want to put pressure on you. Tonight I'm leaving on leave for seven days; in the meantime, think about it, consult with each other, and when I return, you will inform me of your decisions. In reality, things had to unfold in a completely different way. Mussolini was

no longer thinking about Pintor at all. Roatta, referring to the rumors circulating at the time about an offer of succession to Badoglio to the president of the Armistice Commission with France, who was in Rome at the time for reasons related to his position, wrote euphemistically that he considered it 'strange' that Mussolini had thought of him in those 'special circumstances': Pintor was a first-rate general, absolutely up to the task; but he was also orthodox and methodical, in the best sense of the word. However, given his background, he was not the type of man Mussolini needed at that moment; instead, he needed someone who was extremely adaptable and who, by nature and background, represented a clear break from his predecessor, who had been violently attacked by the party and disavowed by the Duce himself. From General Puntoni's diary, we know that Mussolini had already ruled out Pintor as a replacement for Soddu a few days earlier, speaking with the king, describing him as "too slow and doctrinaire." As undersecretary and deputy chief of staff, he had already practically chosen Guzzoni, who, in fact, was informed of his dual appointment on the afternoon of November 29. As for Badoglio, he had no intention of keeping him, especially since he was now leaning toward an even more drastic solution, which also involved Admiral Cavagnari, whom he considered (like the great Admiral Thaon di Revel considered him) responsible for the defeat at Taranto, and that if Badoglio's successor had been Cavallero, he would not have been able to work with him, having chaired the commission of inquiry appointed to investigate the Ansaldo affair. In fact, Mussolini's choice had now fallen on Cavallero, the only one of the possible candidates whose technical abilities were beyond question, as was his dynamism, and whose appointment as chief of staff would have constituted a clear break with the previous administration, put the staunch Badogliani supporters on notice, satisfied the Farinacci and Serena fascists, and reassured the Germans. After all, Mussolini had made no mention of Pintor's solution, which had instead had been proposed by Badoglio with the clear intention, in the event that he himself did not ultimately remain as Chief of Staff, of appointing one of his own men as Deputy Chief and in any case keeping the position free so that he could return to fill it at the first favorable opportunity, is stated in no uncertain terms by Badoglio himself in his Historical Diary, where he notes his conversation with the "Duce" on November 27: The Duce returns on the subject of my resignation, explaining to me the difficulty of finding a replacement. I suggest that he leave the position vacant, appointing a Deputy Chief of Staff in place of Gen. Soddu, and I suggest the name of Pintor. In order not to create further difficulties by demanding an immediate decision, I propose to the Duce that I take seven days' leave so that he has time to make his decisions calmly. The Duagrees. I also point out the advisability of appointing an Undersecretary of War and suggest Generals Guzzoni and Monti. Having proposed his solution, Badoglio leaves for the hunting reserve in Lombardy belonging to an industrialist friend of his. The marshal was convinced that Mussolini wanted to get rid of him, but everything suggests that, in leaving Rome, he thought he would return in a few days victorious, if not completely, but he could not rule it out entirely, at least to a large extent. Suffice it to say that he instructed General Armellini, his replacement during his 'leave' for daily reports to the 'Duce', to immediately deliver to Mussolini a note he had written before leaving, reminding him of the appointments of Pintor and Guzzoni or Monti. At the root of the success that would have

rewarded reward his maneuver were, on the one hand, the repercussions that his dismissal would certainly have had both domestically and internationally; on the other hand, the considerable discontent that was already spreading in the military and that would inevitably be exacerbated by a measure that, while formally making Badoglio the scapegoat for Mussolini's mistakes, was essentially a mark of infamy for the entire military class; on the other hand, the unanimous voice of civilians, who assist them in non-military hospitals, is one of admiration for the wonderful spirit of these young people, whom the torment of the flesh has not broken. You alone, Duce, could have fixed for history the greatness of the event and the pride of our people in words worthy of bronze. No victory bulletin will be more faithfully preserved by future generations than this one, in which, forgetting yourself, you wanted to exalt only the army and the people who are fighting. But whenEngland is defeated, Italians and foreigners will not forget, nor will history, that the great empire had already been mortally wounded five years ago, when you alone saw the fatal crack in the seemingly impenetrable armor and struck with a sure hand. Allow a devoted follower to express the certainty that the results of your noble effort, in which the entire Italian people supports you with unlimited devotion, will be equal to the grandeur of this premise you have created created, will be matched by the results of your noble effort, in which the entire Italian people support you with unlimited dedication" (acs, Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ord. (192 2-1943), phase. 19 7 5io, "Ugo Cavallero"). See q. Armellini, Diario di guerra cit., p. 174, under the date of November 28. prestige of his name and his influence in military circles that no candidate for succession could have had. Faced with the risks of having to deal with so many negative consequences, Mussolini would have backed down, especially since the 'Pintor solution' proposed by Badoglio offered him the chance to do so while saving face. And if he had not wanted to do so, there would have been others to persuade him: the moderate establishment of the regime and, above all, the sovereign, who could not allow such a powerful interference or tampering with his prerogatives in the military field. However, reality would prove to be very different from what Badoglio, with his presumption and lack of political sense. We have already mentioned the the 'Pintor solution'. Mussolini did not give it the slightest thought, both because he realized the maneuver that Badoglio wanted to set in motion through it (the prefect of Turin had informed him that Pintor was a staunch supporter of Badoglio, and as soon as the first rumors began to circulate around his name, Farinacci's much more serious information was added to that of the prefect), and because at such a militarily, it would have been impossible not to appoint a chief of staff. As for the general analysis of the situation that underpinned Badoglio's calculations, none of his three points of reference were realistic. In the military circumstances in which Italy found itself, and even more so when Badoglio's replacement was made public, the international repercussions of this, however irritating they might be, could not overly concern Mussolini. And, at least as far as Germany was concerned, he thought they might work in his favor. As for the internal repercussions, we will see more clearly in the fourth chapter that the psychological situation of the country at that moment was such that, even if Badoglio's dismissal had aroused, Mussolini could not take into account those within the PNF that would have been caused by keeping Badoglio in his position (or a 'Pintor solution'). The latter, even if expressed by a minority of the country,

could have led, at that moment, to a crisis within the party, which would have deprived him of what, despite everything, was still his true and greatest strength and, in those dramatic circumstances, practically guaranteed his power. Mussolini, on the other hand, knew full well that the repercussions within the country were largely dependent on thecourse of the war, so that if it continued to go badly, nothing would silence them and, on the contrary, they would grow, but if the war took a positive turn, they would largely turn into consensus. Nor, despite having lived there all his life, did Badoglio realistically judge the reactions of the military environment. There was certainly discontent within it, and criticism of politicians, the Fascist party, Ciano and, above all, Mussolini was deep-rooted and often radical. However, this did not mean that outside the circle of Badoglio's staunch supporters, Badoglio himself was not also criticized, and heavily so, particularly for his attitude, which was seen as indecisive or ambiguous, depending on one's point of view, during the Greek affair and for his claim to be free of all responsibility. Finally, there were also those who thought that at such a critical moment, despite everything, it was better and necessary to avoid further friction, conflict, and personal rivalries between the political and military authorities and within the armed forces. As a result, Badoglio found himself much more isolated than supported, and his maneuvers found almost no one willing to support them, among the military no less than among politicians. Significant in this regard is the irritation with which Armellini recorded in his diary the large number of congratulatory telegrams sent to Cavallero as soon as his appointment to replace Badoglio was announced on the radio. Nor, contrary to expectations, was Badoglio able to benefit from thesupport of Victor Emmanuel III. The sovereign, of course, remained anti-German at heart (the meeting between Hitler and Pétain had made a bad impression on him and alarmed him) and the war against Greece must not have been to his liking, but Mussolini's arguments that even at the moment of greatest crisis, on December 7, he would continue to consider him "a big shot" who would be able to "get away with it this time too" must, if not have convinced him entirely, at least have induced him not to oppose it. As for Badoglio, even before the question of war with Greece arose, he had reservations. He appreciated him "professionally," but "does not consider him, as many officers in his entourage think, infallible, and moreover does not share his ideas." And the marshal, for his part, despite knowing the king well and for many years, made all the wrong moves in the crucial days of his game with Mussolini: while the "Ducekept him informed to some extent of its most important stages, Badoglio did not even inform him directly that he had sent his resignation to Mussolini. The king was informed of this in a confidential letter sent by Armellini to his first aide-de-camp, General Puntoni. He behaved in the same way when he took 'leave' and left Rome. Once again, the news was brought to the Quirinale by Armellini, who went there on a pretext and communicated it to Puntoni in such terms that the latter noted in his diary with an irritated tone: 'In any case, it is clear that Armellini, either on his own initiative or prompted by others, came to me to suggest a solution to propose to the Sovereign. The solution would be this: to create a deputy chief of staff who, dealing directly with the Duce, would prevent him from acting solely in agreement with the undersecretaries. 'Perhaps,' says Armellini, 'Badoglio could be persuaded to stay, and thus, at such a delicate moment, a crisis harmful to the High Command would be avoided'. I point out to Armellini that

Mussolini would be unlikely to agree to deal with a deputy chief, as he has repeatedly shown that he wants to do without even the Chief of the General Staff. In the end, Badoglio would come out looking the worst! As one might imagine, the king, who had already judged Badoglio's behavior at the outset of the crisis to be "not very loyal" ("While at the time he did nothing decisive to prevent the war on Greece, he is now doing everything he can to shift the blame for the disaster onto the shoulders of others"), was deeply irritated by this attitude, which seemed to want to put him in a position of having to support the marshal without even having had the chance to discuss the situation with him. So much so that when Mussolini, with his usual tactical skill and ruthlessness, presented him with the solution to the question as if it were imperativebased on Guzzoni, Undersecretary of War, and Cavallero, Deputy Chief of Staff, adding that he believed that Badoglio would resign when faced with Cavallero's name, he said heagreed with him. And, speaking with Puntoni, he said that one should not believe that Badoglio was, in the end, irreplaceable. On the contrary, I am convinced that even in this case, every cloud has a silver lining. Badoglio is the kind of person who, once you get to know him well, raises many reservations about his character. First and foremost, in every circumstance, there is him, then everyone else, and when it comes to his own interests are at stake, he will stop at nothing to get what he wants. He is always arguing with his superiors and does everything he can to make them look bad, while on the surface he seems to be the most devoted man in the world... He added that, on the other hand, "the choice fell on Cavallero because he is undoubtedly a man of great professional value." Having obtained the sovereign's general consent, Mussolini took a gamble. That same evening, he announced the appointment of Guzzoni as undersecretary and deputy chief of staff, and the next morning in the Council of Ministers he launched a harsh attack against Badoglio on the basis of the minutes of the meeting at Palazzo Venezia on October 15 ("the extremist" had been the marshal, while he had 'continuously raised doubts and asked for assurances about this and that battle plan and the necessary forces') and described the situation in Greece as precarious, using terms that were completely unusual for him ('it is not yet defeat, but it could become so), but which he needed to indirectly emphasize the dual necessity of having an effective chief of staff and avoiding further divisions and controversy. He made no mention, however, of the idea of replacing Badoglio or of his resignation, clearly not wanting to make any missteps with the sovereign. In practical terms, however, Badoglio ceased to be there, at the Interior Ministry, on the morning of November 30. In the afternoon, Cavallero was summonedto Palazzo Venezia, where Mussolini announced that he would be Badoglio's successor and invited him to remain at his disposal. The following morning, the general was summoned again: This morning, the Duce called me back to Palazzo Venezia and, after a brief discussion about Albania and the measures he has in mind (all of which are excellent), he conferred on me the position of Chief of Staff, telling me that the decree would be issued after Badoglio's return, which would take place in the middle of next week. He said to me: 'So we will resume work together'. He could not have been more open and affectionate. He recommended that I keep quiet until Badoglio's return. But as I was leaving, three ministers greeted me: 'Here is our commander! ' How can one keep a secret? For my part, I am keeping it. With my appointment, the Duce wants the General Staff to work in effective

collaboration, not in Muslim absenteeism, and he intends to hold a meeting with me and my collaborators every day, that is, to truly take command and exercise it with the full cooperation of everyone. I am sure that this will greatly benefit the general course of events. Badoglio's loyalists in Rome and the marshal himself "under the tent" in Lombardy must have realized a few days earlier that things were going badly for Badoglio. On the 27th and 29th, Armellini had met with De Bono ("De Bono is now a fascist who thinks like us, he sees the dark side...") and the two had discussed the "Pintor solution" (which De Bono believed "would not solve anything") and a possible move against Mussolini by the two surviving quadrumvirs, De Bono and De Vecchi themselves, to thwart Farinacci's maneuvers against Badoglio, but in the end they had decided not to do anything "due to their lack of confidence in succeeding in anything." De Bono, on the other hand, had worked to arrange a meeting between the general and the Minister of the Royal Household, Acquatone, who was presented with the solution of "persuading" Badoglio to withdraw, "out of consideration for the situation,". Armellini noted in his diary that this solution would prevent Badoglio from obtaining the satisfaction he sought, but it would avert a great danger to the country, which would become more than ever subject to the obscure and nefarious maneuvers of the Ciano, Farinacci, and Cavallero clique. Perhaps the best demonstration of how much Badoglio must have felt his position crumbling is the fact that, anticipating the expiry of his 'leave', the marshal returned to Rome on the morning of December 3 and immediately contacted Acquatone to inform him that he was "willing to stay" and asking him to arrange a meeting with the sovereign; after that, he asked to be received by Mussolini as well. However, both meetings proved to be a failure. For the first, we have the brief but decisive account left to us by General Puntoni: At 11 a.m., at the telephone request of the Minister of the Royal Household Acquatone, the Sovereign receives Badoglio. I go tothe marshal. He is slumped, his face is green and sad, and he seems to have difficulty speaking. During the meeting, His Majesty tells me: 'Badoglio made a disastrous impression on me. Physically, he is destroyed; intellectually, he is numb. Tomorrow morning, he said, he will go to the Duce to withdraw his resignation..." Through Minister Acquatone, the Sovereign informed the Duce of Badoglio's visit and communicated his impressions of the Marshal. I thus have confirmation that the King does not want Badoglio to remain in the post of Chief of the General Staff. As for the latter, at the end of the morning of December 4, Armellini's report makes it clear that Mussolini enjoys playing with Badoglio like a cat with a mouse and, in the end, after humiliating him in every way possible, he "set him free," without, however, making his replacement by Cavallero official. The relevant communiqué was in fact issued only on December 6, after Mussolini met again with the King, informed him that he had accepted Badoglio's resignation, and, without much effort, made him accept Cavallero as his successor. Here is what General Puntoni noted on the matter: This morning, the Duce had a meetingwith the King. When I went to report at 5:30 p.m., the Sovereign informed me that Badoglio's fate had been decided, despite the Marshal's desperate attempts to backtrack. Cavallero was chosen as his successor. We talked about Cavallero and his turbulent past. The Sovereign gave me to understand that Cavallero's past history was of little importance and that the Duce was of the same opinion. In response to some of the King's objections, Mussolini reiterated: "Cavallero will be careful not to repeat his old mistakes. He will do

well because he has the opportunity to do so. As for public opinion, if the results are good, it will change immediately." The next day, De Bono noted: "The Farinaccians are winning. The King can do little, but he did nothing about Badoglio either. All in all, this judgment is unfair both to Vittorio Emanuele III and in general, given that Badoglio undoubtedly bore heavy responsibility for what had happened and was happening, whatever the outcome." all things considered, unfair both to Victor Emmanuel III and in general, given that Badoglio undoubtedly bore heavy responsibility for what had happened and was happening, and whatever the weight of Mussolini's personal grudges, collaboration between the two men had become impossible. As for the choice of Cavallero, despite his controversial past and his alleged links with fascist extremism, it was almost certainly the best that could be made in terms of military ability and personal dynamism. Moreover, that someone at that particular moment might have thought of using the 'Badoglio case' to play the card of a regime crisis is not only possible but logical, and we will return to this, but it is unthinkable that it was a realistic game that the sovereign could have played. And not because Victor Emmanuel III still had substantialconfidence in Mussolini, as we have seen, but because, as General Puntoni would say to Colonel Amé on December 21, "a crisis of the regime, with the enemy at the gates, would [have been] extremely dangerous" and "ruthless reactions from our ally Germany" were to be expected. This was a risk that the king was far from thinking he could take at the time. And not only because of his character and cultural background, but because at the end of 1940 the conflict had not yet taken on the particular characteristics and significance that it would assume especially from 1942-43 onwards, so that despite the fact that a strong ideological charge was already undoubtedly present and operating within it, it still appeared in many respects to be a fairly traditional conflict. With all the consequences that this appearance entailed, especially for a man like Victor Emmanuel III, both in terms of the rules of conduct to be followed and the even more pessimistic predictions regarding the condition in which those who were defeated would find themselves. Badoglio, as has been said, went to Palazzo Venezia to withdraw his resignation in the late morning of December 4, at 1 p.m. to be precise. The audience had initially been set for 10 a.m., but was then moved back three hours. From General Armellini's account, which, as usual, is based on what the marshal told him, we know that Mussolini told Badoglio that he had sent Cavallero to Albania that morning "to see if Soddu still had his nerves in check" and, if not, to replace him. At the end of the account of themeeting, Armellini comments: The Duce probably anticipates that defeat in Albania is now imminent and is waiting for it to announce Badoglio's replacement and thus make it appear that he is entirely responsible. Nothing more and, as far as the situation in Albania is concerned, even less than Mussolini had said on November 30 in the Council of Ministers. And Armellini served in the General Staff, where, even though the most important communications from Albania first reached the Ministry of War and the Army General Staff, he must have been informed about the situation. Similarly, General Puntoni's diary does not record anything of particular note, except for a brief mention on December 6 of the "things in Albania" that "are going from bad to worse," which is, all things considered, no more dramatic than others from those weeks. Among the memoirs, only those of General Pricolo, undersecretary and chief of staff of the Air Force, and Alfieri (who had been in Rome for about three months due to illness) and,

above all, Ciano's diary (and, based on what the Foreign Minister reported to him, that of Bottai) present a completely different picture of the military situation in Albania and its repercussions in Rome on that December 4, 1940. Ciano writes: Sorice telephones early in the morning to say that we have lost Pogradec and that the Greeks have broken through. He then informs us that Soddu now considers "any military action impossible and that the situation must be resolved through political intervention." Mussolini calls me to P. Venezia. I find him more dejected than ever. He says: "There is nothing more to be done here. It's absurd and grotesque, but that's how it is. We must ask Hitler for a truce." Impossible. The Greeks will demand, as a first condition, the Führer's personal guarantee that nothing will ever be done against them. Before calling Ribbentrop, I put a bullet in my head. But are we really facing defeat? Could it be that the commander has thrown down his weapon before his soldiers? I am not in a position to give military advice, but logically, if the defeat is not already total, it still seems possible to establish a bridgehead at Valona with Geloso's army and a line of defense on the Skumbini with fresh forces. What matters today is to hold out and remain in Albania. Time will bring victory, but if we give in, it will be the end. Mussolini listens to me and decides to make a new attempt. He sends Cavallero to the scene. Then he has another bout of despondency. He says: "Every man makes a fatal mistake in his life. And II made one too when I put my faith in General Visconti Prasca. But how could I not, when this man appeared so sure of himself and all the evidence pointed to him being the most reliable? And the people I work with are useless, worthless." It occurs to me to check the situation through Jacomoni, and I call him on the phone. I immediately get the feeling that things are calmer in Tirana than in Rome.There is a misunderstanding in the air. In fact, Jacomoni interprets that by "political solution," Soddu meant a military diversion on the Greek flank, such as German or Yugoslav intervention. The news from the command also improves during the day, and Soddu and Cavallero leave for Elbasan to assess the situation on the ground. I see the Duce again in the evening. He is calmer. He has had a meeting with Badoglio, who intended to withdraw his resignation. Too late. Mussolini claims that the King himself encouraged him to accept it, saying "that in his opinion Badoglio is now tired". Alfieri's account in his memoirs refers only to the "late afternoon," when Ciano summoned him urgently to Palazzo Chigi to tell him to leave immediately for Berlin. According to Ciano, the situation in Greece had become "truly tragic," with the areas of Vlora and Durres overrun by the enemy and "our troops with their backs to the sea." "The Undersecretary of War" (Soddu, who was no longer undersecretary) "believes there is no possibility of a military recovery and that a political solution is therefore necessary." This greatly impressed the Duce, who was very depressed: so much so that he suggested a truce through Hitler. I want to hope that we have not reached this extreme. I have already told the Duce that I would ask you to return immediately to Berlin to explain the situation personally to Hitler and obtain his prompt military intervention. Again according to Alfieri's account, from Palazzo Chigi the two went immediately to Palazzo Venezia, where they found Mussolini "extremelythan I had ever seen him before," "his face pale and drawn, his eyes swollen and tired,a sad and worried expression," "a beard two or three days long" (a very strange detail, because a few hours earlier the "Duce" had received Badoglio and it is difficult to imagine that he would not have shaved in anticipation of this), who confirmed

Ciano's order to Alfieri to leave for Berlin the next morning. In the following pages, Alfieri recounts that, after leaving Mussolini's office, Ciano, to the See D. Alfieri, Due dittatori di fronte, op. cit., pp. 102 ff. "ministers, generals, admirals, and hierarchs" crowded into the antechamber, he could not resist announcing his departure for Berlin, "and of course everyone agreed that Hitler would intervene immediately.' Finally, the instructions given to him by Ciano were extremely vague: 'Any help, as long as it is immediate. It is useless to specify or express preferences.In addition, the request will be made by our general staff through the military attaché, General Marras. You must obtain a favorable decision in the political arena personally from Hitler. The situation is such that the dispatch of some aircraft and cannons, the reinforcement of some troop units, can be of great help to us. It is a matter of gaining days, perhaps even hours... Let us say right away that Ciano's account presents several obscure pointsand raises many questions. The Historical Diary of the Supreme Command contains, under the date of December 4, this note by General Guzzoni, deputy chief of staff but acting as chief given the still formally unresolved Badoglio crisis:Excellency Soddu telephoned me at 8 a.m. on December 4 to inform me of the impossibility of continuing operations and the need for diplomatic intervention.Examination of the situation gives me reason to believe that the crisis can be overcome and that His Excellency Soddu's point of view is in no way acceptable. The Duce, to whom I report His Excellency Soddu's words, agrees and orders him to fight the enemy to the bitter end. He orders His Excellency Cavallero to leave immediately for Albania to examine the situation on the ground. Indeed, Cavallero's diary reads: This morning at 10:25 a.m., I was in my office. The telephone rang.His Excellency Cavallero to leave immediately for Albania to examine the situation on the ground. In fact, Cavallero's diary reads: This morning at 10:25 a.m., I was in my office. The phone rang. It was the Duce: "Cavallero, come to me immediately." At 10:30 a.m., I was with him; I read a couple of documents and received the order to leave: "The Littorio is ready your plane is ready at the Littorio." In the evening, around 7:30 p.m., after discussing the situation with Soddu and General Vercellino, commander of the Ninth Army, Cavallero telephoned Mussolini from Tirana, and then Ciano at 8:15 p.m. The situation was difficult, even though it had improved somewhat during the day. However, if the Greeks continued the pressure they had exerted over the last three days, the army would be forced to retreat... In the worst-case scenario, there were 8-10 days available. All that was needed was for the men with weapons, equipment, and ammunition of two divisions, one Alpine and oneother infantry division, truly and completely ready, because sending makeshift units is more harmful than helpful... Allow me to insist on the time: at least weapons, men, equipment, and ammunition within eight days. According to Cavallero, "the people," that is, Soddu and the two army commanders, Vercellino and Geloso, were keeping "their nerves in check." This statement is not without interest for us because, before proceeding further in the reconstruction of the events of December 4 and their political consequences, it is appropriate to try to shed light not only on what Soddu actually said to Guzzoni, but also on his state of mind, that is, whether the general spoke with a cool head or in a moment of mental depression. This, let it be clear, not because there can be any doubt about the extreme gravity of the military situation in Albania at that time, but because, depending on the state of mind with which certain things are said, there may

be different ways of interpreting them, especially over the phone. Cavallero's statement leads us to exclude or at least downplay the hypothesis that Soddu spoke to Guzzoni without fully realizing what he was saying. And so we come to Soddu's phone call: there is no doubt that he considered the situation in Albania to be extremely serious, as evidenced by the conclusion of his "Situation at 7 a.m. on December 4" written for Guzzoni during the night between December 3 and 4*: Given the current state of affairs, I must therefore conclude that, with the situation that has now arisen, the pace of reinforcements arriving, as we have seen, does not allow me to foresee the possibility of a recovery, or even of a balance. I came to this conclusion last night after observing the state of fatigue and mistrust among the units and commanders, who see the imbalance of forces increasing every day. Why did Soddu, instead of waiting for Rome's reaction to his assessment of the situation and leave all decisions to it, rush to telephone Guzzoni and suggest an initiative that was, after all, essentially political? The only source available to answer these questions is what Soddu himself wrote (with some contradictions) by Soddu himself in February 1945, in the memorandum sent to Mussolini to refute the accusations of treason made against him by Giovanni Preziosi in "La vita italiana" and, after the war, in his unpublished book Memorie e riflessioni di un generale (Memoirs and Reflections of a General). From the second of these two writings, it can perhaps be inferred that Soddu was prompted to telephone Guzzoni by what he had learned, on the morning of the 4th, from his quartermaster about the state of the local warehouses: 'a few days' worth of food, scarce supplies of clothing and ammunition'. Hence the need to precede the 'Situation' with a phone call to Guzzoni and, during that call, the request (or suggestion?) for 'political intervention': On the morning of the 4th... as we read in the Memoirs, I telephoned General Guzzoni, the new Undersecretary of State for War, and mentioned the contents of my aforementioned report, explaining it to him; and, unable to express myself more clearly (all the switchboard operators were listening to us), I alluded to 'political intervention', which I believed was necessary to get out of an unclear situation. The term "political' was most appropriate, because German action could not be provoked by the military authorities, but only by the political authorities and therefore by Mussolini himself through diplomatic channels. Both in his memoirs and in his memorandum, Soddu states that he thought of German intervention via Bulgaria, which, he adds, had already been mentioned at the meeting on October 15 at Palazzo Venezia, a meeting in which Guzzoni had not participated, so he would not have understood the reference and would have believed that the senior commander in Albania considered the situation so compromised that he deemed it necessary to enter into armistice negotiations with the Greeks. To confirm this, he cites the telephone call, again on the evening of December 4, with Ciano, in the presence of Cavallero; after speaking with the minister, Cavallero passed him the microphone: Ciano said to me, "But what did you mean in this morning's phone call?' 'To urge the planned intervention on that side,' and he replied, 'Ah! Was that it? We agree. We are working on that.' Based on the available documentation, it is impossible to establish with certainty whether Soddu's statement is true; all things considered, however, we are inclined to believe it is true, not least because it is otherwise difficult to understand why Cavallero would have endorsed it. The real issue to be resolved, however, is that of the reactions provoked in Rome by Soddu's phone call. Ciano's account

in his diary (which, incidentally, has a passage deleted in the manuscript on December 5) raises many questions and does not stand up to comparison with other available documentary evidence. To accept it, it would first be necessary to prove that Soddu's phone call upset Mussolini to such an extent that it caused him to have a nervous breakdown and lose control of his reactions; otherwise, it is impossiblethat he would have considered the idea of an armistice. Soddu, who knew him well and who in his memoirs certainly did not skimp on criticism or negative judgments of his handling of the war in Greece, rightly wrote on this subject: Ciano, in his diary, states that Mussolini was so demoralized that he decided to turn to Hitler to obtain a truce with Greece: something I categorically rule out. Ciano'sCiano's intervention to prevent Mussolini from requesting this truce is absurd: anyone could have taken such a step, except Ciano, who was primarily responsible for our misadventures in Albania. Moreover, with this decision, Mussolini would have dug his own grave, while he still had many good cards to play: the best of all, German assistance coming from Bulgaria. There is therefore no reason to believe that Soddu's phone call caused Mussolini to lose control of his nerves, especially since Guzzoni immediately said he was convinced that the crisis could be overcome and was opposed to considering Soddu's proposal as he had understood and reported it to Mussolini, namely to request an armistice. This is not supported by Guzzoni's own notes in the Diario storico del Comando supremo (Historical Diary of the Supreme Command) and even less so by the testimony of General Pricolo, the only one, apart from Ciano's, that is direct and at the same time sufficiently comprehensive to represent 'the other ' version of that dramatic morning, so much so that we feel it is appropriate to reproduce it in its entirety: In early December, during one of my usual morning reports, I found many ministers gathered in the antechamber of the Head of Government. Visibly excited, they were arguing loudly and animatedly, especially the Foreign Minister. What had happened? Something very serious! During the night, the Head of Government had received a long telegram from General Soddu, who, after describing the extremely serious military situation on the fronts of the two armies and declaring his inability to remedy it by military means, begged the Head of Government to "reach a political solution to the conflict." It was a very clear invitation to ask for an armistice. Naturally, we all immediately agreed to categorically reject such a humiliating solution, which would have covered the Italian nation with shame for centuries to come; but on the other hand, the request was there to warn us of the true extent of the impending catastrophe. It was absolutely necessary to hold out until reinforcements allowed us to resume the initiative of operations and, in the most desperate scenario, it was essential to defend at least the ports of Vlora and Durres, where these reinforcements were arriving. Immediately afterwards, it was my turn to report. The Head of Government was nervous and excited as perhaps never before. Have you seen Soddu's telegram? Yes, Duce. And the proposal to request a full-fledged armistice! Rather than asking Greece for an armistice, it would be preferable to leave for AlbaniaAlbania and get ourselves killed on the spot. You are absolutely right, but we will not ask for an armistice. And above all, what we know about the overall course of that day does not authorize it. Like all of Mussolini's normal days, it was framed by routine reports: Private Secretariat, Carabinieri, Special Service, and Police. Beginning at 7:50 a.m., these reports were interrupted at 8:35 a.m. to allow the

"Duce" to receive Guzzoni (who, according to the schedule, was supposed to report to Pricolo later) who had come to talk to him about Soddu's phone call. The conversation between the two lasted until 9:20 a.m. It was certainly during this conversation that Mussolini's Secretariat had to reschedule the audience with Badoglio, set for 1 p.m. (i.e., together with Guzzoni), to 1 p.m. In practice, this was theonly significant change to the planned schedule. After Guzzoni left, Mussolini completed the reports he had interrupted to speak with the deputy chief of staff between 9:30 and 9:45 a.m., quickly dealt with the report from the Ministry of the Interior and, perhaps (but this is not certain), that of the PNF, and summoned Cavallero with the urgency we have seen. Cavallero arrived at 10:30 a.m.30. Ciano, who was supposed to report at the end of the morning, probably arrived shortly before 11:00, but it is not clear whether he was present at the meeting between his father-in-law and the general. When Cavallero left, there must have been a flurry of brief conversations with those still waiting their turn. At 1:00 p.m., however, everything was over, and Mussolini received Badoglio and dismissed him definitively after playing with him, as has been said, like a cat with a mouse, without the marshal noticing anything unusual in his behavior, which, otherwise he would have mentioned it to Armellini. In the afternoon, the schedule of audiences remained almost unchanged. At 4 p.m., it included the examination of issues pertaining to the Presidency of the Council, at 4:15 p.m. others relating to migration and colonization, at 4:30 p.m. those of the Corporations, and at 5 p.m. a meeting on industrial and food requirements. The only audience that was canceled was that with the Corporations, both because the previous one had lasted thirty-five minutes longer than expected and because Mussolini immediately received Starace, who had just returned from Albania, for ten minutes outside the schedule. Only after completing the planned program did Mussolini see Ciano again. It was only natural that Mussolini was worried, tense, and nervous; however, his behavior, at least as can be inferred from his activities on December 4, does not seem to us to justify describing him as a man so distraught that he had lost control of his nerves; quite the contrary, in fact. That said, it remains to be understood why Ciano, in his diary and in his conversations with Bottai, Alfieri, and probably others, gave a completely different picture of his father-in-law's reactions and, in particular, claimed that Mussolini was thinking of a truce, an armistice, to be requested from Greece through Hitler and that it was he, Ciano, who opposed this and persuaded him to adopt a more calm and responsible attitude. If we are to believe what Alfieri wrote in his memoirs, on that late afternoon, before returning to Palazzo Venezia, Ciano was still "in a state of alarm and great excitement." One might think that Ciano, with his emotional and dramatic" temperament, at the same time exhibitionist and presumptuous and, deep down, now polemical towards his father-in-law, who considered his diaries a fundamental document for future history and, therefore, for his own image, behaved in this way driven only by the desire to appear as the "savior of the homeland" in a situation in which even the "Duce" was about to throw in the towel? This is a hypothesis that nothing prevents us from making and which has its own plausibility. But one may also wonder whether there was not something more behind Ciano's behavior. From November 1940 to May-June 1941, the foreign minister's position was, as we have said, extremely precarious and contested, precisely as a result of the catastrophic course of the war against Greece. Almost everyone

wanted Ciano's head: intransigent fascists such as Farinacci, Pavolini, and Serena, but also moderates and large sections of the military hierarchy and the country country, his name was more discredited than that of Mussolini, who, even at this time, had reached the depths of unpopularity. 1 A typical expression of the violent hostility of the old squadrist base against Ciano is a "personal-confidential" memo sent on November 19, 1940, by a Roman squadrist personally to Mussolini. It reads, among other things: "The military circles, the Party, the Ministries of Popular Culture, and Palazzo Chigi are pervaded by boundless contempt for the work of G. Ciano. He is openly accused of frivolity, recklessness, incompetence, and a complete lack of responsibility... Enormous spiritual anarchy now reigns at Palazzo Chigi. The chaos is complete... In all Italian military, aeronautical, and naval circles, and Ciano is considered a complete incompetent and a national disaster. The Party considers Ciano less than zero. An individual who rose only through family connections; a decadent snob, and not very intelligent. They do not forgive him for having claimed to be a member of the squadristi, when he never was, and who, at the time of the March on Rome, flaunted his independence by criticizing the party and writing in the "Nuovo Paese." Air Force pilots criticize Ciano for pretending to wage war as a sport, escorting himself with numerous fighter planes, while other bomber squadrons do not hesitate to do their duty without any protection and without even being mentioned. The Navy considers him its worst enemy, because of the strange protection he gives to E. Somigli, a mediocrity who rose to prominence through political maneuvering. The military despises him, considers him an amateur, and resents his interest in military matters, as he is completely incompetent. In conclusion, Ciano is spoken of as one would speak of the most unintelligent of men, and there is no hiding the regret at seeing that you, Duce, insist on supporting him. There are even doubts as to whether what Ciano himself is spreading through his lackeys at Palazzo Chigi is true, namely that you, Duce, are tired and old, and that you have therefore chosen him as your successor and that you have handed over the main levers of command to him. And even if you want to get rid of him, you can no longer do so today, because you are his prisoner. Remember, Duce, that the center of pietism and defeatism is in Palazzo Chigi. Try to investigate today with intelligent expert agents and you will see what is being said about our misfortune in Taranto and Tirana. Duce, your work is imm. You have accomplished it with your genius, your energy, and your spirit of sacrifice, butyou have accomplished it with us, with our work, with our sacrifices. We have given you everything, today we give you our children without a tear. However, we do not want this masterpiece that is today's Italy to be ruined by the unconscious incompetence of some of your collaborators. In these days of mourning for our navy, it is simply shameful to have a Foreign Minister who is busy with his hunting lodge he is having built in Albania. (Ask the Zingone company, which is in charge of the construction). Everyone knows today that our undeserved defeat in Albania, which we are ashamed to even mention, is due to Ciano's hysterical haste. We allowed ourselves to be beaten by the weakest of the Balkan armies. It is not enough to be related to the Duce to be a good statesman. Duce, we are not asking foryou for one thing. Reaffirm in us fascists the trust we have always had in you. Show us that you are not a prisoner of feelings or of the cliques that surround and entangle you. Show that everything Ciano's filibusters say in and outside Palazzo Chigi is absolutely false.

Change the guard at Palazzo Chigi and purge the environment thoroughly, otherwise we will be back to square one. It is with deep sadness that I have had to write the above to you. I know I am causing you grief, but in the end I decided to do so out of scruples, for fear that you are not aware of what I have explained, and finally because I am an Italian, a genuine former combatant, a squadrist (unlike Ciano) and a father who has two sons at war and is about to send a third. Show, Duce, that you know how to be rightly severe not only with the humble, but also with those in high places when they err or are unworthy of the positions to which they have been appointed. Duce,work, then, and win this battle too, for Italy, for Fascism, and for all of us, your squadristi" (ACS, Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ris. (1922-1943), b. 115, phase FP/R, 'G. Ciano'). In Turin, Milan, and other places, writings against him appeared on the walls. His participation in the operations as a pilot was the subject of ridicule, and when, in March, he returned and reappeared for a moment as foreign minister, Goebbels in Germany was surprised and indignant ("Ciano was also present [at the signing in Vienna of Bulgaria's accession to the Tripartite Pact]. Bounced out again from the depths") \ in Italy, the Florence-based fortnightly magazine Il Gufo, taking its cue from an apologetic article in the magazine "Tempo" on "life in the camp with Colonel Ciano," published a short article entitled "Enough!" in its May 20 issue. This was while in many circles the names of those who would replace him at Palazzo Chigi were being bandied about (generally that of Grandi, but also those of Pirelli, Volpi, and even Farinacci), and it was assured that, although he was still formally in office, he was no longer minister and that the relevant measure was about to be formalized with his appointment as ambassador to Berlin or Moscow or even Rio de Janeiro, or as minister for Italian Africa in place of Teruzzi. These rumors were so widespread and considered so well-founded that on December 15, theUS embassy in Rome on December 15th transmitted to Sumner Welles the rumor of Ciano's forthcoming appointment to Berlin and on January 28th that of his possible replacement by Grandi. In the wake of the Greek affair, all the old resentments, antipathies, jealousies, and accusations resurfaced in recent months with a ferocity that is difficult to convey realistically ("The ferocity of theagainst Ciano and the way... in which his imminent replacement is being discussed," noted E. Ortona on December 1), but which finds vast and unanimous confirmation in all contemporary Italian and foreign documentation. During these months, the most difficult time for Ciano was between the end of November and the beginning of December, when he was relieved of his command of the 11th Army by Visconti Prasca, replaced first by Soddu as undersecretary and deputy chief of staff, then by Badoglio as chief of staff, and a few days later by Cavagnari as undersecretary and chief of staff of the Navy. Everyone expectedand hoped that Ciano would also be dismissed. The moods and motivations may have differed, but everyone believed that leaving him in his position was unfair, immoral, and dangerous. This was especially true for those who wondered how the military would react when they saw all the responsibility being placed on them, while Ciano came through the storm unscathed. Suffice it to say that when Mussolini went to the king on December 5 to inform him that he had "released" Badoglio and that his choice for the succession had fallen on Cavallero, Vittorio Emanuele III pointed out to him "the discontent" that was circulating everywhere towards Ciano, Cavagnari, and Admiral Somigli, and a few hours later, speaking with General Puntoni, he stated that he believed their replacement

was imminent. Just one week after December 4, Ciano's reaction to the breakthrough of the front at Sidi-el-Barrani would be: "Let's not say now that it's the fault of politics. Neither Jacomoni nor Ciano are involved here." Such a cynical and unscrupulous attitude, to the point of exploiting Graziani's defeat as proof of his own lack of responsibility in the Greek affair, allows us to conclude that Ciano, feeling the water up to his neck, seized theopportunity offered by Soddu's phone call to revive his image and shore up his position, trying to establish himself as the only one who had not lost his head, had been able to persuade Mussolini not to precipitate matters irretrievably and had thus saved the situation, and also to reiterate the thesis that what was happening in Albania was not the fault of politicians, much less his own, but of the incompetence and cowardice of the military.In this perspective, the fact that this further weakened Mussolini's already shaken prestige in the eyes of his collaborators must have seemed secondary to him. For old-school, uncompromising fascists like Farinacci, what mattered most was saving Mussolini, relieving him of all responsibility and strengthening his resistance. for Ciano, at that moment, what mattered most was saving himself. Unless it was Ciano himself who lost his head on the morning of December 4 at Palazzo Venezia (in which case it is reasonable to think that the phrases attributed to Mussolini in his diary are actually his and vice versa) and that, therefore, everything or almost everything he said and wrote was invented at a later date so as not to give further ammunition to those who wanted him removed. We say this because such a hypothesis can be suggested by some 'notebook pages' that the editor of Il Telegrafo" while in Berlin, where he was staying at the time, noting what Alfieri had told him in private on December 9 about the events in Rome on the 4th, his meetings on the 7th and 8th with von Ribbentrop and Hitler, and his telephone conversation with Ciano after speaking with Hitler. Regarding the former, Ansaldo reports: He [Alfieri] was due to leave for Germany at the end of the week. On Wednesday morning, he went to Palazzo Venezia and found several ministers (Buffarmi Guidi, Guzzoni, whom he insists on calling "Guzzelloni," Zenone Benini, and others) who were very concerned about the bad news coming from Albania. In fact, a telegram had arrived from Soddu talking about the need for "a political solution." While they were gathered together commenting on the situation, Ciano came out, took him aside, and said: "It's defeat. It's the end. You must leave immediately to warn the Führer and try to get him to agree to an armistice." However, a few minutes later, Ciano, having overcome this initial bout of pessimism, approached a table where there were maps of Albania and began to mark what could be the lines of a retreat that would save the essential, namely Valona. This possibility heartened him and made him think and say that perhaps the catastrophe could be avoided. However, he confirmed to Alfieri that he had to leave as soon as possible. In the afternoon, Ciano took Alfieri to the Duce, who was calm "but tragic" (I am repeating Alfieri's account). The Duce mentioned the serious setbacks in Albania, saying: "It is tragic that I had to lead the Italians to defeat'. However, he gave him the following general guidelines for his action in Germany: to try to obtain aircraft for troop transport as soon as possible; to try to get Yugoslavia to join the Tripartite Pact; to try to obtain some diversion from Bulgaria or Romania (concentration of German divisions) to distract part of the Greek pressure. These directives were confirmed to Alfieri in the evening by Ciano, who also added that Alfieri should try to obtain light artillery; and more vaguely "whatever he could."

Among other things, he urged him to leave as soon as possible, and by plane. When Alfieri pointed out that his arrival by plane at this time of year would be tantamount to an alarm signal of a desperate situation, Ciano said, "Dino, listen to me: it may be a matter of hours." We have dwelled at length on the events of December 4 not only because of their objective interest, but also because, influenced by what Ciano wrote in his diary, even scholars of great scientific rigor such as A. Hillgruber have asserted that it was as a result of these events that Mussolini renounced the "parallel war" and decided to "request German assistance, both for the 'great' war in the Mediterranean and for the war against Greece," and that Alfieri was sent by him on an urgent mission to Berlin precisely for this dual purpose. Mussolini's instructions to Alfieri, as reported by the latter to Ansaldo, do not justify such a conclusion, nor does Alfieri's account. If anything emerges from this, it is, if anything, aMussolini who was more agitated and inclined to ask the Germans for not only political but also military help and who, deep down, tended to push Alfieri to interpret his instructions broadly, dramatizing the situation with the Germans in order to induce them to commit themselves not only politically in favor of Italy. This clarification may seem, perhaps, like splitting hairs, but in Mussolini's biography it is not. The end of the "parallel war' was not the consequence of a choice, albeit a forced one, because it was provoked by the dramatic military reverses suffered, but was imposed on the 'Duce' by Hitler. It was C, even though his pro-German sentiments of the previous months were now fading and he was about to reinvigorate the anti-German stance he had abandoned when it seemed that the Axis would defeat England any day now (Bottai's diary is eloquent in this regard), the Supreme Command, and a number of fascists, both intransigent and intellectual, who saw the war as a revolutionary opportunity to achieve "true" fascism at home and a "new order." As far as the Supreme Command is concerned, it is one of Roatta's usual memos to Graziani, dated January 13, 1941. In it, the deputy chief of staff of the Army reported to his superior his own views and those of Guzzoni (who was in fact actingthe duties of chief of staff at that time, Cavallero having taken command of the Greek-Albanian front) on the thorny issue of 'joining forces with Germany for the general and concerted development of operations' and also informed him of the 'Duce's' reaction up to that point: My opinion was and is to 'lay our cards on the table' with our ally. In other words, to speak clearly in order to bring about truly joint action, even if, for obvious reasons, we did not achieve a truly unified command. I spoke with Guzzoni in this regard and subsequently sent him a memorandum. acs, r. oraziani, b. 58, phase. 47, sub-file 9. Subsequently, His Excellency Guzzoni sent a similar memo to the Duce, who returned it declaring it "accurate." But the matter was not pursued further. We will discuss the orientations and moods within the PNF at length in the fourth chapter. For now, we will limit ourselves to mentioning the position of Ugo Spirito, as it appears from his book Guerra rivoluzionaria (Revolutionary War), which remained unpublished until 1989. Bottai had seen it come into being, had it christened, and then submitted it to Mussolini, who, while judging it "intelligent" and probably being influenced by it to some extent, considered it contradictory in at least some of its basic theses. It is an important book, both for the intellectual biography of its author and for understanding some of the most debated issues during the war years among fascist intellectuals who felt the need to give the conflict a markedly ideological character and to specify the

"revolutionary" objectives to be achieved bothinternally and in the international consortium. It is so important that we will have occasion to return to it, but here we consider it necessary to take into account only one aspect of Spirito's argument, which Mussolini considered its greatest "weakness." Spirito did not hide the existence of an "imperialist spirit" among the Germans, which constituted 'an obvious danger'; however, he believed that it could 'be magnified or eliminated depending on how it is addressed in one way or another': "to prepare for a better future," it was necessary to leverage the "revolutionary ideal" common to both regimes and "sincerely unite with Germany in a collaborative effort aimed at achieving the most just new order." Italy, with its two thousand years of awareness of the difference "between a spiritual action of a universal nature and the affirmation of a particularistic imperialism," was the only one capable of "say a decisive word to giveexample of that new life, in which the victors and the vanquished could agree once the war was over." Hence, according to Spirito, the need to collaborate sincerely and unreservedly with Germany. Loyal collaboration means renouncing mistrust and reservations. Mistrust breeds mistrust, and a Germany that sees itself held in suspicion cannot help but fall back on a position of defense and offense, reinforcing imperialistic tendencies and taking the necessary precautions to live in a situation of strength. If we continue to view Germany through the lens of Versailles, we can expect no other response than one that aims to overturn Versailles with the same weapons, only more ferocious. As soon as Germany commits an act of aggression in the economic and political sphere of another nation, we tend to ask ourselves in astonishment: will these be the methods of tomorrow? Who will save us from the crescendo of appetites? But few people add to these questions, few can add thiscomplementary question: have we done anything to encourage different methods and different goals? The conditions for loyal and revolutionary collaboration are provided first and foremost by the confident spirit of expectation with which we must approach Germany. We must show it that we expect from its collaboration what we have vainly believed we could obtain from the democracies, namely a just peace that respects the interests and ideals of all. And we must urge its pride in this mission, which goes beyond any imperialistic aims and any assertion of power. We must show Germany that we understand its intelligence, which enables it to use force only in the service of its own interests, which coincide with the good of all. Those who have no established positions to defend, but horizons to broaden and ideals to achieve, can understand this language and feel the appeal of a work of global renewal : but of course the world must demand this and believe in it with conviction and sincere faith. Faith creates faith, and trust engages pride: this is especially true when it comes to a people accustomed until now to being looked upon with fundamentally unjustified contempt and hatred. Bottai's diary has preserved Mussolini's criticism of this thesis: [Mussolini] points out the weak point of the book, where, recognizing the inevitability of German hegemony, Italy is advised toopportunity to join forces to mitigate it. 'How can this thesis convince people, when the methods of German hegemony are already before our eyes? When we ourselves, as allies, are at loggerheads with the Germans in Greece, Croatia, and Slovenia to defend our economic and political positions? Moreover, the Berlin conference is taking place these days, which cannot enchant the world. And how could it, when many of the participating

states are occupied by the host nation? Denmark, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Norway, Croatia..." Although imposed on him by the reality of the situation, Mussolini refused to consider the end of the "parallel war" definitive, so much so that for quite some time (especially when some reversal in the war situation gave him gave him hope for a détente and a certain rebalancing of relations with Germany), he tried at least to counter the spread of German hegemony from the military to the political sphere, where he thought he still had room for maneuver and which he increasingly considered to be the decisive one. And not only in relation to the situation that would arise after victory, but, as time went on, also to the achievement of victory itself by theAxis. Returning to the events immediately following December 4, the Italian and German accounts of the talks Alfieri had on the 7th of that month with von Ribbentrop and on the 8th with Hitler, and the related diplomatic correspondence between Rome and the embassy in Berlin, show that Alfieri, probably influenced by Ciano's catastrophism (who on the evening of the 8th even had to call him to urge him to calm down), took a line with the Germans that went beyond that indicated to him by Mussolini, presenting the situation in Albania in more dramatic terms than the "Duce" would have liked, and, in some respects, even was, and the sending of aid by the Germans as extremely urgent, without, however, being able to specify what it should consist of. So much so that, as soon as he read his report on the talks with Hitler, Mussolini immediately sent a telephone message to the Führer stating that, except for fifty transport aircraft, Italy was not requesting military aid. In the same telephone call, Alfieri was also instructed to inform Hitler that in the days immediately following, the "Duce" would not be able to leave Rome as he had to install the new military leadership. In a "personal" telegram sent to Ciano in the middle of the night between the 1st and 2nd of August, Mussolini stated that he had decided to send a new military leadership to Albania.Duce' would not be able to leave Rome as he had to install the new military leadership. In a 'personal' telegram sent to Ciano in the middle of the night between the 18th and 19th, Alfieri euphemistically described the German attitude towards Italy as 'complex'. In fact, this had now reached a real turning point. We have already seen how Berlin had for some time already on the alert and clearly oriented towards a definitive "clarification" with Rome. If we add to this the fact that the Germans were, as Alfieri immediately realized, very well informed about the Italian situation and, on the one hand, extremely skeptical about the possibility that it could be patched up by the Italians on their own, but, on the other hand, aware that they could not seriously intervene in Greece for at least three months, it is easy to understand how the only real reaction to Alfieri's double move was an explicit and peremptory request from Hitler to meet Mussolini as soon as possible on December 14 at the Brenner Pass or, better still, at the Berghof. But this was precisely what Mussolini did not want, at least until he could present himself to Hitler with a less disastrous military situation. This was partly a matter of pride and self-esteem, and partly because he realized that, after what he had written to him on November 20, this time Hitler would not fail to make Italy and its claims to partnership in the political conduct of the conflict bear the full weight of German power and the damage caused to the prestige and freedom of movement of the Axis by the war against Greece. Hence his insistence onItaly and its claims to partnership in the political conduct of the conflict, the full weight of German power and the damage caused to the prestige and

freedom of movement of the Axis by the war against Greece. Hence his justification for refusing to meet Hitler on December 14, the excuse that he absolutely had to remain in Rome to install the new military leaders to replace Badoglio and, a few days later, that he could not yet leave the capital because of the British offensive in Egypt. And again, having exhausted the more or less plausible excuses, which Berlin at least formally accepted, he simply ignored the new German requests to finally set a date for the meeting for a good two weeks. As one can easily imagine, at the point where things had reached, and with the setbacks in Albania compounded by those in North Africa, this delaying tactic only served to make relations between Rome and Berlin even more difficult, to embitter the Germans, and confirming their determination to reach a definitive "clarification" that would once and for all bring the Italians into line. This was all the more so because Rome, while avoiding any clear discussion or commitment, was taking diplomatic initiatives without Berlin's knowledge, which Berlin did not like at all (towards the USSR) or wanted to conduct according to its own criteria (in the Middle East) and, on the political front, said it did not need any special military aid (to the point of even balking at the invitation to withdraw the air force sent to participate in operations against England in order to engage it in the Mediterranean instead). At the same time, on a technical level, it made massive and urgent requests for raw materials and supplies, presenting them as normal and falling within the scope of agreements between the two countries that had never been clearly defined. What is more, it did so in a way that would have discouraged even those with the best of intentions: overlapping initiatives and missions that, within a few days, presented different and sometimes contradictory requests, suggesting suggested a situation of chaos and a lack of serious plans. Two examples allow us to assess the Germans' state of mind and their lack of confidence in Italy's chances of recovery. Immediately after the meeting with Alfieri on December 8, Hitler, who was well aware that, apart from the setbacks and difficulties that it would cause in the preparation of the campaign against the USSR, in order to actively intervene to help Italy and settle the game , he considered the Italian situation so precarious (it cannot be ruled out that Berlin was also aware to some extent of the armistice proposals discussed in Rome on the 4th) that he believed that, all things considered, it was appropriate for Germany at that moment to try to promote an armistice between Italy and Greece. To this end, he instructed Admiral Canaris to conduct an unofficial survey of the Greek representative in Madrid, Pericles Argyropoulos, without Rome's knowledge. Berlin's proposal was based on three points: 1) German troops would take up positions between the two opposing sides to to guarantee compliance with the armistice; 2) the Greeks would retain the territories they had conquered in Albania; 3) Greece would resume a position of neutrality in the conflict between the Axis and England (which would lead to the withdrawal from Greek territory of the British forces that had arrived there after the Italian attack). The survey took place on December 17 and produced virtually no results; however, contacts were not abandoned until February. At the same time, Hitler decided to include in his military plans for 1941 (which he had already modified once immediately after the Italian attack on Greece, introducing the occupation, if necessary, in collaboration with the Bulgarians of Macedonia and Thrace, and a second time in early December, before the situation in Albania and North Africa deteriorated, providing for afull-scale action as far as

Athens and beyond, to begin at the latest at the end of March and conclude in time to use the troops engaged in it in the attack on the USSR in May). However, Rome was kept carefully in the dark about these decisions for the time being. As A. Hillgruber rightly observed, allowing Italy to collapse completelywas not only outside Hitler's political conception, but would also have endangered German positions in the Balkans and certainly led to the establishment of a German southern front in southern Italy and southeastern Europe. This did not mean, however, continuing to allow Italy the freedom of maneuver that not only conflicted with German interests and aims for the future, but also created complications for Germany in both the political and military fields military fields. Hence the urgent need to put relations between the two countries on a new track. The extent of Hitler's determination to proceed in this direction became clear on December 19, when Alfieri went to see him again to communicate the contents of a letter that Ciano had written to him two days earlier, instructing him to explain to the Führer the requests for raw materials necessary to prevent the immediate collapse ofItalian industry. While saying he was fully aware of the needs of Italian production, Hitler replied that he would immediately forward the requests to his experts so that they could study and resolve the problem "according to the criterion of 'highest economic yield,' that is, by coordinating the respective industrial needs of the two countries" and also taking into account the actual possibilities of transport. He added that he believed that, in all possible cases, it was better to send finished products to Italy rather than bulky raw materials and to provide as much as possible for production in Germany, where it would be greater, thanks also to "new contingents of industrial workers" that ItalyItaly could make available. Finally, he reiterated the need for a meeting with Mussolini in order to present to the Duce, in the presence of those responsible for war operations on the Italian fronts, some of his observations resulting from his experience of war, and to learn of the Duce's plans and intentions, with a view to coordinating and harmonizing his decisions for the near future. In the absence of any reaction from Rome, on the 21st Alfieri made a cautious request to Ciano: The Führer will leave Berlin tonight for his usual residence, keeping himself available for the aforementioned meeting. If this is not possible, I consider a visit by Your Excellency to be useful. I also note that, if this has not already happened, contact between our Chief of Staff and this High Command would be welcome here. The next day, Ciano replied: The meeting between Cavallero and Keitel can take place when Cavallero has completed his mission in Albania, which consists of turning the situation around. Once the turnaround has begun, the meeting between the Duce and the Führer can also take place. On the 25th, Alfieri returned to the charge with a long report dedicated to the state of mind the Stimmung of the Germans with regard to the military events of recent weeks and to Italy, which is difficult not to consider at least in part artfully constructed to reassure Mussolini and push him to meet with Hitler. In it, after stating that these events "have not affected the Reich's friendship towards Italy" and its consideration for the person of the "Duce," Alfieri wrote: Here we think that, precisely because we are friends and allies, inextricably linked by the same common fate of war, victory (or defeat), we must mutually express our thoughts and opinions, as Himmler maintains, without this being interpreted in any way as a sign of a lack of friendship, mutually advising and helping each other to achieve the best result. For example, we must not feel offended if, in a spirit of

deep friendship, disapproval is expressed about the way in whichfrom a technical-military point of view,action in Greece; just as we should not feel annoyed if some requests cannot be immediately satisfied. It is thought here that a failure by Italy or Germany compromises the political and military prestige of the Axis as a whole; and it is concluded that, precisely for this reason, Italy cannot, out of a misplaced sense of prestige, have the right to bear the burden of the current battles alone, a burden that may also extend to other fronts. Less than a week later, on December 31, Hitler took up his pen and wrote Mussolini a letter that was very skillful in form and substance, showing how well the Führer understood the state of mind of the "Duce" and was trying, in a certain sense, to make it less difficult and painful for him to come face to face with him.3 We believe that three main points can be distinguished in the letter. The opening is more personal, one might even say human (we will return shortly to the very important aspect of the personal relationship between the two dictators), but not without some brief hints of what he intended to say to him in person: At the end of thisyear, I feel the need to express to you from the bottom of my heart my best wishes for the new year. I do so with a feeling of friendship that is all the warmer because I can imagine that recent events will have detached you from many people who are of no significance to you, but in return will have made you more sensitive to the sincere camaraderie of a man who feels bound to you in good times and bad, in prosperity and adversity. Let me begin this letter by stating one thing, namely that the events that move us all today have countless examples in the history of wars and peoples. In most cases, the great powers have launched attacks against small states, almost always with insufficient resources, and then very often suffered setbacks in the early stages of these struggles. German history provides a whole series of examples in this regard. That is precisely why I believe it is necessary in such cases to attack when possible with superior forces, even at the risk of losing the sympathy of those who want to see equality of forces as a necessary prerequisite for the just recognition of the victor. Following the events in Greece, as well as in Albania and North Africa, I am constantly thinking about truly effective countermeasures that can be taken, especially on my part. By 'effective', I mean avoiding all those aid that is self-defeating, and instead carry out truly decisive operations that are in themselves a relief. As far as direct aid to Italy is concerned, your wishes, Duce, are known to me. They will be satisfied as far as we are able. In some areas, this will not be possible. However, it will be possible to provide other forms of aid that will nevertheless lead to the desired result. This was followed by a sort of summary overview of the major political and military aspects of the conflict (England, France, Hungary, Romania, USSR). Finally, as regards the issue that most closely concerned Italy, after a very brief mention of the situation in Albania: it is only necessary, Duce, for your front in Albania to stabilize, so that at least the main part of theGreek and Greek-British armies are engaged there, it moved on to North Africa: Duce, I do not believe that a large-scale counterattack can be carried out here at the moment. The preparation of such undertakings requires at least three or four months. But then the season arrives when, in any case, German formations cannot successfully enter into action there. Even armored vehicles, unless they are equipped with special cooling systems, cannot be used effectively in such high temperatures. In any case, they cannot be used for long-range operations that require days of continuous use.equipped with special cooling

systems, cannot be used effectively in such high temperatures. In any case, they cannot be used for long-range operations that require days of continuous use. The decisive factor there, it seems to me, is to reinforce anti-tank weapons, even at the risk of depriving other Italian formations of them in the early stages... First of all, however, I believe that, as I have recently emphasized, we must seek by all means to weaken the British maritime position with the air force, as the situation cannot be alleviated by the use of troops on the front line. It concluded with a reference to March which, although not binding, suggested that the actual German intervention in support of the Italians would take place around that month. Mussolini's reply, very brief and awkward, was immediate: I thank you for the very important letter that was delivered to me yesterday by your ambassador. I will give you my reply as soon as possible. In the meantime, please accept my comradely greetings. It was at this point that Alfieri, who was responsible for delivering the 'message' to the Führer, 'message', resorted to the only card that he thought Mussolini might be sensitive to: the situation that would arise in the Balkans and the Mediterranean if the whole matter with Germany were not renegotiated in some way, and if, by remaining silent, Italy gave Germany carte blanche. During the night between January 4 and 5, Alfieri sent Ciano a "personal" telegram focusing entirely on this aspect of Italian-German relations, which is worth quoting at length: I believe I can confirm that numerous German divisions are currently concentrating in Romania. This concentration is clearly in preparation for a date that, given the pace at which it is taking place, should be assumed to be not far off, an offensive action against Greece through Bulgaria. The Ribbentrop-Filoff meeting therefore aims to prepare, through appropriate negotiations, the transit of German troops through Bulgarian territory. Such attempts naturally also affect our political situation in the Balkans. In fact, while until now attempts have been made to obtain Bulgaria's accession to the Tripartite Pact, and therefore to a pact of which we are a leading member, the aim now is to reach a German-Bulgarian political-military agreement in which, at least formally, we do not figure. If we take into account the effect that the, it is reasonable to predict that this new agreement, which is so important and desirable for overturning our military situation on the Greek front, will have an unfavorable impact on our influence in an area of vital interest to us... It is obvious that a German success in Greece would not only change the political situation in the Balkans but also the situation in the entire eastern Mediterranean. Germany would find itself in that area, with its forces at its disposal, in a privileged and predominant position and would largely resolve what has been its traditional push towards [the south]. And our so-called Lebensraum would undergo a substantial change. The above considerations are not intended in any way to hinder German projects, which are mainly dictated by the necessity and possibility of the moment, but only to point out that events of fundamental importance for our our interests in the Balkans and the Mediterranean, and that at this particular moment it would be appropriate to hasten the well-known meeting in order to make timely "precise" agreements to coordinate our respective military and political actions "for the future" and to avoid finding ourselves faced with situations that, even with the best of mutual goodwill, would be difficult to change. I am well aware of the reasons why this meeting has not yet taken place, but to delay it further for a relatively long time would not make a favorable impression on the Führer and would perhaps lose much of

its purpose because, in the meantime, Germany might be forced to take definitive political and military decisions, for which [our] active collaboration would be welcome. In the evening, Ciano informed Alfieri by telegram that the "Duce" was "most willing to meet with the Führer on a date to be specified between the 12th and the 19th" and that he could communicate this to von Ribbentrop, together with Mussolini's wish that the meeting be "strictly secret" and without any formalities, in Italian or German territory, at Hitler's choice. It is certain that the news and analysis of the situation presented by Alfieri (and which in the following days were also confirmed by the military attaché in Berlin, General Marras) had contributed to pushing Mussolini to take this decision. It must be said, however, that for a couple of weeks in Rome, pressure in this direction had multiplied and become more insistent, especially on the part of Guzzoni, the Supreme Command, and the Ministry of War itself. Until about the middle of the month, Mussolini's hostility to meeting with Hitler and asking for not only political-diplomatic and material and military aid, but also organic units before inflicting at least some local defeats on the Greeks, must have been comforted to some extent by the sovereign. In the second half of December, however, the worsening, rather than improving, began to undermine Mussolini's resistance and also caused the king to change his mind, so much so that on the morning of the 19th, Cavallero, examining with von Rintelen the problem of German supplies of raw materials, armaments, and means of transport, was able to propose "on behalf of the Duce' to send 'an armored division to Libya as a maneuvering and counterattack element'. In the afternoon of the same day, a much more significant event took place. Soddu had telephoned to announce that the Greeks had broken through in Vai Shushitza and were threatening Valona, and Mussolini had expressed to Cavallero 'the opinion that, given the tragic situation... all that remains is to put everything in the hands of the Führer because there is nothing we can do," adding that Ciano would leave immediately "to go to Germany to discuss the matter." However, this did not happen because Cavallero resolutely opposed it, saying he was sure he could restore the situation, and subsequent news was less dramatic. From Ciano's diary, we know that, in any case, the day after, Mussolini had prepared a message for Hitler asking for German intervention in Thrace from Bulgaria, but he had not sent it, waiting first for a report from Cavallero, who had returned to Albania during the night to assess the situation personally. The following day, the 21st, Mussolini spoke with General Marras, who told him that the Germans would not be able to take any action in Thrace until March and that, even for the defense of Vlora, it was useless to ask them for troops, as these could not arrive for at least a month and that, therefore, the best thing to do was to consider "sending two German armored divisions back to Libya." Having come to this conclusion and reassured by Cavallero about the situation in Albania, the "Duce" became convinced in the following days that it was possible to "give Valona some breathing space" with a limited offensive operation on the front of the 11th Army, which, once new troops had arrived from Italy, would be followed by another on a larger scale, thanks to which he hoped to a) reassure the Germans of the Italians' actual staying power (thus obtaining from them the dispatch of an Alpine division, which Mussolini would have preferred not to use if it had arrived in time, not deploy, but which he understood he could not refuse), b) boost the morale of the troops, which he considered essential for a decisive turn in operations against the Greeks, c)

concentrate efforts on restoring the situation in Africa. It was in this context that Alfieri's dispatch helped to give the final push to convince Mussolini, albeit with some effort (referring to the telegram sent to Alfieri instructing him to inform von Ribbentrop of the 'duce's' 'availability' to meet Hitler, Ciano noted: 'Until now, Mussolini had procrastinated. He does not like to appear before the Führer under the weight of numerous failures that have not been at least partially redeemed') that postponing the meeting any longer would be increasingly difficult and, above all, dangerous. Until the 1st, he avoided setting a precise date and, in the end, chose the furthest date among those indicated, the 19th, hoping that in the meantime some good news would finally arrive from Albania. The meeting between Hitler and Mussolini took place on January 19 and 20 at the Berghof, the Führer's private mountain residence , with the participation of von Ribbentrop, Ciano, Keitel, Guzzoni (Cavallero was unable to leave Albania), von Mackensen, Alfieri, von Rintelen, and Marras, among others. It consisted of a series of technical discussions among those present and a couple of larger meetings.1 The two dictators had at least two meetings alone, as did von Ribbentrop and Ciano. Contrary to his fears, Mussolini did not hear any accusations or recriminations. Hitler in particular was extremely friendly towards him, even affectionate. Ciano concluded that his father-in-law was pleased with him; Alfieri, on the other hand, describes him more acutely in his memoirs as being "in a strange psychological state," which he managed not to show during the two days of the meeting, but which contributed greatly to make them a "torture" that he could not wait to end. And, in essence, it was mainly because of Hitler's attitude and his conviction that "comfort and confidence by extolling the strength of the German armed forces and his powerful reserves." According to Alfieri, after his first private meeting with Hitler, Mussolini vented to him: Hitler was courteous, friendly, and understanding with me. Too much so. That man is hysterical. Telling me that no one more than he had experienced and shared my anguish, he had tears in his eyes. All this is exaggerated. He made me feel and weigh too much his kindness, his generosity, his strength, and superiority. The sincere and deliberate study and effort he put into relieving my embarrassment ended up offending me. Wait before claiming victory. We still do not know what the final plans of the God of battles are. From a political point of view, the meeting did not change anything in the relations between the two allies and, on the contrary, gave Mussolini confirmation that Germany, while wanting to avoid hasty moves that could be detrimental to the prestige of its armed forces, would commit itself both to settling the Greek question (towards the end of March) and to supporting Italy against the British in Libya and the Mediterranean. And, formally, without any quid pro quo, except for the request already made by Hitler in his letter of December 4 to intervene as soon as possible in Spain to try to persuade it to break the deadlock and side with the Axis. So much so that Ciano commented: Overall result of the visit: good. There is absolute solidarity between the two Axis countries and we will march together in the Balkans. We are entrusted with the task, which I believe to be very difficult, of bringing the Spanish prodigal son back into the fold. Beyond appearances, the meeting of January 19-20 at the Berghof almost completely realized the German decision to end the "parallel war" and to include Italian participation in the context of Germany's global military and, as far as possible, political strategy, which it effectively supervised. And if Berlin did not go further, it was only

by Hitler's will. Even the Führer, as he said during a meeting at the Berghof on January 8 and 9, which was attended by the most senior German political and military leaders and was convened precisely for the purpose of discussing the attitude to be taken towards Italy, was convinced that the Italians should be 'kept in line'; contrary to von Ribbentrop, Ambassador von Mackensen, and the OKW, who, from a military point of view, would have liked direct control over the Italian armed forces, sending a Wehrmacht marshal (not to mentionAdmiral Fricke, who even argued for the need to place them under German command), he was of the opinion that demands should not be too heavy so as not to risk breaking the precarious balance between the two countries, or provoking "a change in Mussolini's attitude," which he considered the only sure element in the Italian situation, and that it was not even appropriate to establish systematic cooperation between the two high commands, as this would inevitably have made the Italian side privy to German operational plans. According to A. Hillgruber, Hitler's position was motivated by the fact that he "did not want to do anything that might offend Mussolini and thus damage the mutual trust between the heads of state, which he saw as the most valuable link in the Axis." This explanation can be interpreted in various waysin various ways. On the one hand, it can be explained by the Führer's continuing fears in the first half of October 1940, which had led to General Thoma's mission to Italy. On the other hand, in Hitler's concern (probably the most valid, according to Hillgruber) to avert the risk of having to bear the burden of a southern continental front as a result of Italy's defection following Mussolini's removal by forces hostile to fascism and the alliance with Germany, which had been strengthened by the reversals in Greece and Africa and would have drawn further strength and support from excessive humiliationimposed by the Germans on the country and its armed forces. A third key, which does not exclude the other two but rather complements them, is the very special character that Hitler gave to his personal relationship with Mussolini and the political significance he attributed to it. Joachim Fest, in his biography of Hitler, while noting some fundamental differences in character between the two men, explained this relationship with the substantial affinity of their personalities and, in particular, with their common will to power: despite all the individual differences between the two men, Mussolini's mobile extroversion, his tendency to be quick-tempered, his spontaneity, his generosity and openness to life, in such stark contrast to Hitler's rigid introversion, the two were essentially alike: the will to power, the hunger for greatness, the sensitivity, the charlatan cynicism, and the theatricality of one corresponded to similar traits in the other. While fairly accurate in terms of character, has the flaw of neglecting all other types of motivation, starting with the most important, the ideological-political one, so that, in our opinion, it is inadequate to shed light on such a historically important relationship. In Hitler's conception, as it appears in Mein Kampf, there were, as is well known, two countries whose 'natural interests' were not substantially opposed to those of France 'to the conditions ofexistence of the German people" and, "indeed, to a certain extent, identified with them" and could therefore be possible allies of Germany: England and Italy. This was not only because of the lesser influence that Jewish finance had in these two countries compared to that which it had in France, but also because, according to Hitler, the interests of England were always opposed to French preponderance and at the same time not opposed to the fundamental

interests of Germany. While Germany was projected towards the east, England was projected towards the east, and Italy towards the south. in France, because, according to Hitler, England's interests were always opposed to French preponderance and at the same time not opposed to Germany's fundamental interests. While Germany was projected towards the east, English interests were essentially represented by domination of the oceans and Italian interests by domination of the Mediterranean, so that they could coexist. On the road to agreement withItaly, there were two obstacles: South Tyrol, which Hitler, already in Mein Kampf and then in the so-called Secret Book (1928), said he was determined to remove, even if this could create difficulties with the most ardent Pan-Germanists, and Austria, which, on the other hand, Italy had to remove by not opposing the Xróta. If Hitler was intransigent on this point, consider the crisis in relations between the two regimes in 1934, when Mussolini thwarted the first Nazi attempt at Anschluss, and then the "Mussolini, I will never forget" of 1938, when the "Duce" resigned himself to the union of Austria with Germany. Even before coming to power, the fact that Italy was a fascist regime led by Mussolini played powerfully in his favor in favor of an alliance with Italy. that Italy had a fascist regime and that Mussolini was at its head. Like many Germans, especially those on the right, Hitler had little regard for the Italian people. He recognized very few real talents in them, perhaps only that of being great colonizers. In keeping with a certain petty-bourgeois culture of his time, he looked with sympathy on Greek culture rather than Roman culture, which had resulted in Roman Catholicism, and considered Italians, as Mediterraneans, to be racially inferior, although not to the same extent as the French, who were now on the path to "nigrification." Finally, deep down, he had not forgotten that Italy had thwarted the Nazis' first attempt at Anschluss in 1934, and he considered Italians, as Mediterraneans, to be racially inferior, although not to the same extent as the French, who were now on the path to "nigrification." Finally, deep down, he had not forgotten that Italy had thwarted the Nazis' first attempt at Anschluss inand considered Italians, as Mediterraneans, to be racially inferior, although not to the same extent as the French, who were now on the path to 'nigrification'. Nor, finally, had he forgotten the 'betrayal' of 1914-15. Paradoxically, his low opinion of the Italian people and even more so of its ruling class played entirely in Mussolini's favor. There were various reasons why the "Duce" appeared to Hitler to be "a great man," to the point that, although in his "political testament" he was extremely harsh on Italy, even going so far as to blame it for Germany's defeat, he nevertheless stated: "The Duce, personally, is my equal. He may even be superior to me in terms of his ambitions for the Italian people." Among these reasons, one of the most important was that this "great man," this "authentic Roman," this "incomparable statesman," was forced to operate with such a people at his disposal and having to deal daily with the thousand difficulties caused by the monarchy, the Church ("the international of priests based in Rome"), and a civil and military ruling class still largely composed of aristocrats, reactionaries, and "fossils" with no contact whatsoever with the the people or reality, but capable of ensuring that "the state, unlike the people, is only half fascist." And yet, he had managed to accomplish a "prodigious work" ("creation of new industries, construction of schools and hospitals, grandiose colonial achievements") that had earned him "immense popularity." Among the reasons why Hitler admired Mussolini, considered

him a "master," and felt great gratitude toward him, the decisive one was the "historic" role that Mussolini had played in the destiny of Europe and, in essence, of National Socialism itself, having understood, like very few others, the full extent of the Bolshevik danger, raised first raised the banner of revenge and led it to victory, not only in the field of armed struggle, but also in the struggle of ideas: What would have happened if Italy, instead of becoming fascist, had become communist? We must be grateful to the Duce for having removed this danger from Europe. In doing so, he rendered a service that we must never forget. Mussolini is a man of secular stature. His place is marked in history... He did not defeat communism with brute force, but with the power of ideas. His main merit is that he was the first to tackle theessence of Bolshevism and for having shown the world that even in the 20th century it was possible to restore a national consciousness to a people. This merit is of incalculable significance... Now, our program was drawn up in 1919, and at that time I knew nothing about him. Our doctrine rests on its own foundations, but the thinking of every human being is a resultant. Let it not be said, therefore, that Italian events did not influence us. Probably the Brown Shirts would never have existed without the Black Shirts. The March on Rome in 1922 was a decisive turning point in history. The simple fact that such a thing could be attempted and successfully carried out gave us strength. A few weeks after the March on Rome, I was received by Minister Schveyer. This would certainly not have happened without that event. If Mussolini had been quickly defeated by Marxism, I don't know if we would have been able to remain standing. At that time, National Socialism was a very fragile plant. In addition to these cultural and ideological-political reasons were added others of a more personal nature which, for the purposes of a complete understanding of Hitler's relationship with Mussolini, should not be underestimated. At least one of these seems essential to bring to the reader's attention, as it is directly linked to one of the most characteristic aspects of Hitler's personality, the importance he attached to 'destiny' in all its possible manifestations and projections and, therefore, also to the value of the parallelisms that it seemed to indicate. From this perspective, Hitler saw his own destiny and that of Mussolini as two "parallel destinies" that manifested and reinforced each other not only in their shared anti-Bolshevism, in the common beginnings of their movements' struggles, and in the common adversaries against whom they fought side by side, but also in particular moments of their personal biographies, such ashaving both worked as bricklayers in their youth. For Hitler, this constituted "even on a purely human level" a further "bond" to the "deep friendship" he nurtured "for this extraordinary man." For a man as introverted as he was, who ultimately despised his collaborators, considering them all inferior to the historic task to which he had called them, this friendship must have taken on a special value if, as it seems, on the occasion of Attolico's farewell visit to him before leaving theembassy in Berlin on the eve of the Italian intervention, he went so far as to say: "Without Mussolini's friendship, I would be alone in the world." Two years later, speaking with the Minister of National Education, Bernhard Rust, he even established a sort of connection between his faith in the "victorious destiny" of his cause and the agreement with Mussolini: It is not the armies in the field against us that shake my faith. Nor do the great leaders who guide the peoples opposed to us shake it. But I would be afraid if they told me that Mussolini had turned against me. This explains what Albert Speer wrote in his

memoirs about his state of mind in the days following July 25: After the fall and disappearance without trace of the Italian head of government, a kind of Nibelung loyalty seemed to arise in Hitler. There was nowas no Grand Report in which he did not ask that everything possible be done to find his missing friend. He said he was oppressed day and night by anguish. Even though they were increasingly worn down and even fractured, according to Goebbels, by the meeting in September 1943, the first after Mussolini's liberation on the Gran Sasso, Hitler had to preserve this image and the particular type of relationship that derived from it retain until the end of his days. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain why, even in the very last pages of his "political testament," he returned to Mussolini with thoughts not of hatred or disappointment, but of heartfelt human understanding: Italy had tried to emulate ancient Rome. It possessed all the ambitions of the Romans, but it lacked the two essential complements of a decisive spirit and material strength. The only good card it had was the leadership of a true Roman. What a tragedy for that man! And what a tragedy for that country! For peoples, as for individuals, it is tragic to have ambitions and possess neither the essential means to achieve them nor the slightest hope of securing them. This came after he had defined in previous pages as a mistake his "unshakeable friendship for Italy and for the Duce" and "not having listened to the voice of reason that required me to bedespised even in my friendship for Italy," and explained this mistake by the fact "that such an attitude on my part would have offended him and that he would never have forgiven me." By this we certainly do not mean to say thatHitler's relatively moderate attitude towards Italy, in contrast to the much more radical proposals of the top German political and military leaders who met at the Berghof on January 8 and 9, 1941, to establish the line of conduct to be followed in the talks with the Italians a few days later, can be explained solely by his admiration and friendship for Mussolini. As has been said, this attitude was certainly influenced by very specific military considerations, primarily those of averting the risk of having to take on a southern continental front as a result of Mussolini's possible ouster and, therefore, Italy's defection. In addition to increasing the burden on German military commitments (and here the argument must be broadened further than Hillgruber's, since Italy's defection would have meant a significant loss for Germany, even from a naval point of view), Italy's defection, but also its complete subjugation, would have been a political setback of enormous proportions for Hitler. He was well aware that, in the eyes of the world, Germany and Italy constituted a single, inseparable entity from an ideological and political point of view and that, despite everything, Mussolini was still seen as the 'master'. The political cost of breaking this unity would therefore far greater than the military cost. And we make no distinction between the cost of replacing Mussolini and the cost of providing military aid to Fascist Italy without bringing it completely 'into line'. In fact, the complete subjugation of Italy and its placement under strict German control would have been, from an ideological and political point of view, an even greater defeat than that which could have resulted from Italy's defection, following Mussolini's ouster, from the Axis: it would have meant causing Hitler and the New Order, in whose name National Socialist Germany claimed to be fighting, to lose all credibility. Hence Hitler's "moderation," his choice not to place Italy completely under control and to limit himself essentially to putting an end to its ambitions to continue the "parallel war" . It is

perhaps difficult to determine who should be credited with taking advantage of thethe opportunity to secure a kind of pledge, obtaining new shipments of workers, which the German economy badly needed at that time. Before moving on to examine the impact of the Berghof conference on Mussolini's policy and, above all, on Italian-German relations, we must now ask ourselves whether and to what extent the "Duce" realized the significance that the conference had for him, beyond appearances and what conclusions he drew from it. According to his memoirs, Alfieri made a tentative inquiry during the conference to understand whether Mussolini had considered the possibility of attempting to break away from Germany, citing as justification the prolongation of the conflict far beyond the deadline so confidently predicted by the Germans and the fact that he had made it clear to them from the outset that Italy was not in a position to face a long war. Mussolini reacted to this probe with surprise and violence: "Can you imagine me accepting a compromise solution for Italy under the shame of defeat?!" There is no doubt that this response corresponded to his state of mind, but this does not exclude the possibility that, deep down, he now regretted having brought Italy into the war and that, in circumstances less unfavorable to him, he would have been willing not, of course, to seek an "honorable solution" to get out of it, as he understood that this would have been impossible without irreparably compromising his power and exposing himself to German revenge, but to encourage a general settlement of the conflict on a basis of compromise. Even though he still had no doubts about Germany's final victory, and therefore, for better or worse, that of the Axis, and was convinced that a compromise peace would amount to little more than a truce, because war would inevitably break out again soon, Mussolini was now aware that, at this point, a German victory would be little less than a defeat for him: it would allow him to present himself as the victor, to flaunt a series of territorial gains with which to mask the reality of the situation for the moment, but it would establish, within the new international order, a position of second-class status for Italy with respect to Germany and an almost complete failure of his political strategy. Indicative of Mussolini's complex state of mind are some of his statements made before meeting Hitler, preserved in the diaries of Bottai and Gorla, as well as his attitude in Bordighera on February 12, when he met Franco and Serrano Suner to convince them to align Spain with the Axis. Serrano Suner's account of the meeting in his memoirs1 is more reliable in this regard than the official report, which was intended to be sent to Berlin. It shows that Mussolini did try to persuade the "caudillo" to break the deadlock and, at least, to set the conditions and timing of Spanish intervention, but also sincerely understood the difficulty of Franco's position and the "great responsibility of deciding on a nation's entry into war." Even more indicative is that this state of mind did not change and, in fact, strengthened after the conclusion of the war against Greece and Yugoslavia and the reversal of the military situation in Libya, just when the prospect of a victorious end to the conflict in the not too distant future briefly reappeared in the minds of many, and to some extent in Mussolini himself, even if in him it took on a dual meaning of relief and hope, but at the same time of discouragement and fear. Ciano, who by this time had completed his psychological detachment from his father-in-law ("a constant: his decisive, clear, violent detachment from the Leader, of whom he speaks with open contempt," Bottai noted in those days2), so that it is difficult to question his reliability in this regard, reports under the date

of May 6 that, having presented him with "some considerations," "for which a compromise peace should be welcomed by us as a favorable event, especially now that we have made our booty," he had found him agreeable. And it is probably no coincidence that abroad, in the summer of 1941, rumors continued to circulate insistently, collected and disseminated by various press agencies, about Italy's alleged intentions to withdraw from the conflict (so much so that in early October, concerned about their possible repercussions in Berlin, AlfieThis second possibility, however, depends exclusively on England, which, I think, will be careful not to attempt it because English prestige must absolutely be restored and maintained at a high level and cannot forgive the hard blows it has had to take. If this second hypothesis were to occur, which, I repeat, I cannot believe, it would not be a real peace but only a truce, and the war would resume within a short time. Yet the damage caused by the Germans' massive aerial bombardment of England is immense, and only the stupor of that tenacious, valiant but inert people allows its criminal rulers to continue their race towards theabyss." See R. Serrano Suner, Entre les Pyrénées et Gibraltair cit., p. 229. Less reliable, due to its drastic nature, seems to us the statement by E. Faldella, Revisione di giudizi cit., p. 319, who reports (without any indication of the source) the following exchange between Franco and Mussolini: "Duce, if you could get out of the war, would you do so?" "Of course I would! Of course I would!" See G. Bottai, Diario cit., p. 268 (May 19, 1941) and also p. 274 (July 1, 1941). See G. Ciano, Diario cit., p. 509, as well as p. 531 (July 6, 1941), where a statement by Mussolini is reported ("I now seriously ask myself whether, for our future, a German victory is not more desirable than a German victory") which is certainly not without significance from a psychological point of view, but which in our opinion should be considered above all as a manifestation of Mussolini's intense irritation with the Germans in those days, a sudden outburst ofanger, rather than a rational statement. felt the need to draw Ciano's attention to them); rather than a mere press campaign organized by the Anglo-Americans to sow suspicion among their adversaries and support their own public opinion, which was particularly depressed at the time, we believe that we should think of it as a distorted amplification of news gathered in Vatican circles and close to Mussolini and some of his closest collaborators. Finally, even more significantly, even some members of the German resistance, who were working to reach a settlement of the conflict with American help, thought at around the same time of seeking Mussolini's support, finding him, it seems, "very favorably disposed to such an attempt" and "absolutely in favor of peace." That he had secretly regretted entering the war and that, while still convinced that victory would ultimately smile on the Axis, he was in favor of a compromise settlement of the conflict that would prevent Germany from winning outright and give him back a certain freedom of maneuver does not mean, however, it is worth repeating to avoid any misunderstanding that Mussolini did not realize that the only option left to him was to make the best of a bad situation, accept reality, and that is, the new relationship with Germany determined by the setbacks accumulated in Greece and Libya. As he would say to Ciano in June 1941, "for the moment" there was nothing to be done: "we must howl with the wolves," and, even more explicitly, the following month, for now there is nothing to be done: we are on this track and we must stay on it. But we must hope for two things: that the war will be long and exhausting for Germany and that it will end with a

compromise that saves our independence, while a total victory for Germany would have made Italy a "vassal nation." If this was true in June and July, in a military situation that had now been reversed, albeit thanks to German intervention in the Balkans and the arrival in Libya of the first contingents of the Afrika Korps, it was even more true in January, in a context entirely conditioned by the negative progress of operations in Greece and Libya and by the concerns and irritation this aroused in Berlin. And in fact, there is no doubt that Mussolini was already aware of what would come of it even before the meeting at the Berghof, and it cannot be ruled out that he secretly feared that it would turn out even worse. So it is perhaps even possible to wonder whether it was precisely the talks of January 19-20 and Hitler's "moderate" attitude that led him to believe that, in the final analysis, Italy was, at least politically, "indispensable to Germany" and, therefore, to the possibility of climbing back up the slope down which he had fallen, putting a good face on a bad situation "for the moment," without, however, secretly giving up on the idea of a "parallel war" and, as far as possible, containing German interference, even trying to establish defensive measures in case relations with Germany, instead of improving, deteriorated. This was a possibility that various facts seemed to confirm seemed to confirm, so much so that during 1941 Mussolini would have considered it not unlikely on more than one occasion. Among these facts, two were particularly significant. First, Berlin's delaying tactics regarding the transfer of South Tyrolean foreigners to Germany and its coincidence with a resurgence of South Tyrolean irredentism, supported moreover by the Gauleiter of Innsbruck, Franz Hofer, the Gauleiter of Innsbruck. This complex set of events led Mussolini to say to Ciano in the summer: "It is now clear that they are preparing to ask us to move the border to Salorno, and perhaps even to Verona." Then there was the way the Germans behaved in April during the military operations in Yugoslavia and Greece and subsequently during the political reorganization of the two countries: the military ignored Italian "rights" in such a blatant and insulting that they risked armed clashes with their ally (as at Ponte Perati, where the Germans prevented Italian troops from passing) and prompted Hitler to intervene to modify some of their more serious initiatives (due in part to the pressure to conclude the campaign as quickly as possible, but also largely to their admiration for the Greeks and contempt for the Italians), and in particular by Marshal List, who had accepted the Greek request to negotiate surrender only with the German command; and by the Wilhelmstrasse, which not only ignored, albeit in a less explicit and brutal manner, the previous repeated assurances about Italy's "rights" in the Balkans, but was even less receptive to Rome's requests than to those of Budapest and Sofia (even though the latter had entered the conflict at the last minute and even though Berlin now said that Mussolini had correctly assessed Greece's attitude the previous year and was therefore not wrong to attack it) and favored the creation of a Croatian Ustasha state larger than theItaly wanted and, therefore, more reluctant to accept Italian claims on Dalmatia2 and, therefore, more inclined to support Cfr. sme uff. storico, La campagna di Grecia cit., I, pp. 809 ff.; ddi, s. IX, VI, pp. 892 and 894; G. Ciano, Diario cit., pp. 505 and 508 ff.; G. Gorla, L'Italia nella seconda guerra mondiale cit., pp. 166 ff. and 178 ff.; U. Cavallero, Diario cit., pp. 162 ff.; E. Rintelen, Mussolini l'Alleato cit., pp. 130 ff. The situation in Dalmatia caused perplexity and divisions among the regime's leaders. Vittorio Emanuele III was opposed to any annexation beyond that of a few strategically important islands, and

he used to sum up his thoughts with the quip: " Dalmatia, what a disgrace! ' And, 'if it weren't for certain understandable sentimentalisms', he would have been in favor of ceding even Zara (cf. G. Gorla, L'Italia nella seconda guerra mondiale, pp. 172-191; G. Ciano, Diario, p. 506). The Army General Staff considered "any extremist demands regarding Dalmatia to be dangerous" (ibid.), but overall, the military's main concern was to prevent the new borders from running too close to the coast. Attilio Tamaro was a staunch opponent of any annexation, considering the situation in 1941 to be completely different from that of 1918, also in terms of the ratio between the Italian and Slavic populations, and saw the Italian presence as "a perennial beacon of civilization, an irreplaceable bond between the two peoples" (see A. Tamborra, Attilio Tamaro. L'italianità adriatica, in "Fortuna," March 9-April 9, 1956, pp. 60 ff.). However, the annexationists were in the majority and could count on the support of the Navy, which was interested in the Dalmatian bases and in particular in Cattato, and of a large group of senators who were very active in claiming the whole of Dalmatia up to the Dinaric ridge, Felici, Dudan, Tacconi, Salata, etc. (cf. DDI, s. IX, VI, pp. 764, 838 ff., 852 ff.). From the outset, Palazzo Chigi was oriented towards extremism. Typical in this regard is what Luca Pietromarchi, who would be entrusted with the leadership of the Croatian Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs until 1943, noted in his diary on April 16: "In the morning, Anfuso asked me if I could send a memorandum on Dalmatia to the Duce in the afternoon. I promised him I would. While the General Staff officers prepared a map showing the borders of the territories that would be distributed to the numerous states bordering Yugoslavia, Prof. Randi and I prepared the memorandum on the Dalmatian question. I support the maximum thesis. I have no indication of what the Duce's ideas may be. On the contrary, it has been repeatedly emphasized to me that we must think about tomorrow and the repercussions that a totalitarian solution to this problem could have on our relations with Croatia, but I am increasingly convinced that any half-measure would lead to nothing. In any case, it is not possible to ask for less than what the Italian government asked for in 1915 when it began negotiations for the Treaty of London. The crux of the matter is this: if we give ports to Croatia, we reduce the others, i.e., those that will remain in our possession, to the situation of Fiume, that is, we will deprive them of all their functions, since Croatia, instead of using them, will channel its traffic to its own ports. To avoid this misfortune, there isforce Croatia to use the Dalmatian ports, and therefore either all of Dalmatia comes to us or it all goes to the Croats. There is no middle ground" (the Pietromarchi Archive). Submitted to Mussolini (who at first considered the possibility of creating a Kingdom of Dalmatia or Illyria, closely linked to Italy), this proposal was practically accepted. In a note to Ciano dated April 17 (see ddi, s. IX, VI, p. 850), the "Duce" expressed his support for the "annexation" of the entire territory from Segna to Cattar© and from the coast to the Dinaric Alps, even in the event of a "personal union" between Italy and Croatia and "a special political and administrative regime that will allow the peaceful coexistence of the two main races that inhabit it." Faced with Pavelic's stubborn resistance and in order not to exacerbate relations with the new Croatian state, Mussolini soon changed his position, so that the Treaty of Rome of May 18, 1941, with Croatia (which also sanctioned the accession of Duke Aimone d'Aosta to the throne of Croatia) assigned to Italy the islands of Arbe, Veglia, Lissa, Curzola, and Mèleda and, on the mainland, only the

areasthe heights of Mount Vir in Split (up to a maximum depth of 40 kilometers from the coast) and around the bay of Cattare. See O. Talpo, Dalmazia. A Chronicle for History, 1:1941, Rome 1985, pp. 293 ff.). Berlin against Rome, on which the Germans also placed the entire burden of having to negotiate thestructure of the new Croatian state not within the framework of an overall settlement of the Balkan region and, therefore, with their official involvement, but directly with Ante Pavelic. On this whole aspect of Italian-German relations in the spring of 1941, a report dated May 1 sent by Alfieri to Ciano after the latter had met with Hitler on April 20 and with von Ribbentrop on April 21-22 in Vienna, and while he was preparing to meet Pavelic together with Mussolini. In Vienna, Ciano had been informed by his German colleague that Germany agreed that Italy could annex the part of Slovenia "not incorporated into the Reich," but he was surprised to learn that the border had been "irrevocably fixed by Hitler" not where Rome thought, but considerably further south, passing just three kilometers north of Ljubljana. As for Croatia, the Germans, agreeing with Pavelic's point of view, were in favor of assigning a large part of the Dalmatian coast to it and did not look favorably on the Italian idea of a personal union with Italy, so much so that Ciano had the impression that von Ribbentrop considered Croatia "a state very close to, if not part of, the political-economic system of the Reich" and not part of the Italian "living space." . Faced with Ciano's firmness in reiterating Italy's demands, von Ribbentrop ended up showing himself to be more open to possibilities, but in reality he was not at all, since he had left the resolution of both issues to direct negotiations between Rome and Zagreb with the twofold argument that the Führer wanted to confirm to Italy "Germany's political disinterest in Croatia" and that in both cases it was a matter of "exclusively Italian interests." Nor had things gone much better on other issues. If no difficulties had been placed in the way of the reconstitution of Montenegro as an independent state (something that, for family reasons, was very dear to Victor Emmanuel III) united with Italy by constitutional and political ties, and the annexation of the Ionian Islands to Italy and of the Greek territories up to the Florina-Pindo-Arta-Prevesa line to Albania, the inclusion in the latter of all the Yugoslav areas populated by Albanians had met with resistance from all those regions (for example, the Mitrovica salient, where there were German-owned mines) where it clashed with the direct interests of Germany and even with the claims of Bulgaria, to which the Germans were prepared to give, in addition to Macedonia, Thessaloniki. In light of what had emerged in the Vienna talks, what had happened during the campaign against Yugoslavia and Greece, and the 'climate' in Berlin, Alfieri, in his report, described the situation of Italian-German relations as follows: The negative impression of the first talks in Vienna, which had been mitigated and improved in the subsequent talks and contacts between His Excellency Minister Ribbentrop, has been reinforced in my mind. Regardless of the truly serious inconveniences that occurred during the course of operations and which can, in part, be explained (but not justified) by the desire of German unit and department commanders to advance as far as possible, occupying areas and positions that should have been left to us; by the failure of telephone communications; by a disconnect between the various Italian and German liaison bodies due to the rapid development of operations; the fact remains that the agreements previously established by the two general staffs were not respected by the German side, at

least in spirit; suffice it to mention the withdrawal of our troops from the area north of Ljubljana; the forced march of Hitler's personal regiment to reach Gianina; the capitulation of the Greek army without consultation and cooperation with the Italian side; as well as the German attempt to occupy Kotor and Ragusa, an attempt that failed due to the unexpected rapid convergence of our columns. At the meeting in Vienna, where it was clearly hoped that Your Excellency would not be so ready and so well prepared to react to the detailed German studies on the various maps prepared well in advance, an attempt was made to immobilize Italy's freedom of action with the formula of establishing the new borders of Croatia through direct negotiations, knowing full well that this course of action would be a source of long and difficult discussions that would inevitably create a state of tension between the two countries. Pavelic, in front of his people, could easily have accepted a solution desired by the Axis, but he will adhere with great difficulty to agreements that take away part of Croatia of its territory. If Germany did not consider that the borders had been setby the Axis powers, it would have been much better for Italy to assume direct patronage of the new Croatian state, establishing the new borders of Italian Dalmatia by force. This gives rise to the well-founded suspicion that Germany, by favoring the creation of a greater Croatia and hiding behind the formula of direct relations between Italy and Croatia, is leaving us with the most odious part, encouraging Croatia to resistance. As a result, Croatia will have to be grateful to Germany for all it has already obtained and will obtain, while it will have to hold a grudge against Italy for its unfulfilled aspirations. Germany, which has the military occupation of the country, is already carrying out its policy, if not outwardly, then deeply, so that Croatia will inevitably end up falling into the German orbit in the not too distant future. ddi, s. IX, VII, pp. 37 ff. (It is interesting to read the interview with the Croatian Deputy Head of State and Minister of War Kvaternik attached in summary). It is worth remembering here how sympathetically the Germans listened to the Hungarian and Croatian requests for access to the sea, forgetting that they had entered the war with Poland to cut off its connection to the sea. Nor can the issue of nationalitycan be taken as a determining factor, after Germany occupied Poland and Czechoslovakia and established a protectorate over Slovakia. I do not believe that any precise agreement was reached at the Vienna conference regarding the realization of Italian claims, while Hungarian and Bulgarian aspirations were largely satisfied outside and (for the Bulgarians, who received much more than their maximum aspirations) in contrast to direct and vital Italian interests. Since Italian aspirations should have been satisfied in priority over all others, it is necessary and urgent that precise agreements be made with Germany , documented in writing and supported by maps, also to avoid unpleasant discussions later on, such as that concerning the occupation of Fiorina by Bulgarian troops. I repeat that it is necessary and urgent to establish clearly that Italian interests cannot be postponed in favor of the interests of other small countries, which have made no active contribution to military actions. Italy, which has endured such harsh trials and is currently sacrificing an empire to the cause of the Axis (which, after the war, will have to be reconquered with great sacrifice), has every right not to see its aspirations disputed or opposed. On the, Germany must realize that it is in its best interest for the continuation of the war to have an Italy that is satisfied and fully confident in its ally. In fact, Germany, surrounded by enemies on all sides, will need Italy's close

cooperation to maintain peace and guarantee the new order. The Führer is perfectly aware of these truths and necessities, which coincide with his declared desire to give full satisfaction to the Duce and to Fascist Italy. But in the German leadership, the Führer's intentions may be distorted by an exaggerated sense of Germanism and the usual lack of moderation, which prevent the concrete implementation of his will. The executive bodies are currently so consumed by a fever of expansion and domination that they often force the hand of the governing bodies. It is therefore in the supreme interest and an imperative necessity that, at the next meeting, the Duce, dealing directly and personally with the Führer, should illustrate the Italian problems and ask specifically for their full satisfaction. It is also necessary that the agreements reached and the lines of demarcation be clearly set out in writing, because anything that remains vague, unexpected, or postponed to the future will inevitably and seriously harm our interests. The weak point inAlfieri's analysis was in the conclusion, where he proposed the "imperative necessity" for Mussolini to obtain personally from Hitler "full satisfactionfor Italy and precise written agreements that would prevent Germany from reneging on its promises in the future. Although the Greek affair had now been settled without damage to Germany and, indeed, had opened up (especially with the occupation of Crete) favorable prospects for possible action in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, Mussolini was certainly not in a position to obtain from Hitler what Alfieri hoped for. This is demonstrated by the disappointing outcomeoutcome of the talks that he, Ciano, and Cavallero had with the Führer, von Ribbentrop, and Keitel at Brenner on June 2: formally cordial, they did not bring any clarification to relations between the two countries (nothing was said on the German side about the now imminent attack on the USSR), to the point that, given their outcome, Mussolini suggested to Ciano and Cavallero that they strengthen their personal ties with Ribbentrop and Keitel as the only way to obtain information about German intentions. They did not dispel the Duce's concerns about German policy towards Vichy, and as for the Mediterranean, they made it clear that the Germans, at least for the moment, did not intend to make any serious commitment in that theater, but to limit their military presence toto what was necessary to maintain possession of Libya and ensure their presence in North Africa. This was the context for Mussolini's recurring outbursts against the Germans, which he indulged in privately and which counterbalanced the praise and flattery he had to offer them in public. A typical example was the speech he gave to the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations on June 1, on the first anniversary of Italy'sentry into the war. It was, not surprisingly, one of his least effective speeches of those years, and until the last moment he was tempted not to deliver it ("I would have to praise our collaboration with Germany, and that now repulses my spirit"). Even Ciano defended him against his critics ("But what else could the Duce have done in the current situation?"). There were also a number of initiatives that confirmed how, beyond the façade, relations between the Axis partners were precarious. A typical example was the decision to continue the fortification of the borders, despite the further difficulties this caused with Berlin and the considerable economic and raw material costs involved, particularly in the provinces of Belluno, Udine, and Gorizia, which bordered Germany and were not protected by the natural barrier of the Alps, as that of Bolzano, where, moreover, the work was not interrupted but only slowed down in an attempt to throw some smoke in

the eyes of the Germans. Furthermore, when on July 24, 1941, at the end of a note sent to the Supreme Command to inform it of his assessments of the political-military situation and its possible developments and to indicate the measures he considered indispensable for strengthening the army between then and the following spring in order to enable it to cope with any eventuality, he stated that he considered it necessary to establish a maneuvering force of at least twenty divisions in the Po Valley, it cannot that among the reasons for this decision was also the desire to have these troops available to counter any German action against Italy. On the basis of this set of factors, it is no mistake to say that Mussolini's irritation, resentment, distrust, and hostility towards the Germans reached their peak during the spring and summer of 1941, especially during the German military operations in the Balkans and the subsequent territorial and political reorganization of that region: just when thethe Axis seemed to be riding high and England's fortunes were at their lowest. This is significantly confirmed by the fact that it was precisely in the late summer of 1941 that Berlin (which knew and intuited a great deal about the mood of the Fascist leadership and Mussolini himself) took the first measures to protect itself against Italy by beginning to develop the so-called 'Valkyrie Plan', which provided for a forceful intervention in Italy in the event of either an excessive weakening of Mussolini's regime or a strengthening of doubts about Italy's loyalty to the alliance. An examination of the contacts between Rome and Berlin, of the letters exchanged between the end of January and the beginning of April between the Führer and the 'Duce'1, and of the political and military initiatives taken or attempted during the same period by Mussolini, in particular his repeated efforts to regaingain control of the situation on the Albanian front and go on the offensive before the Germans intervened, and to make their intervention in Libya unnecessary or at least delay it, allows us to realize that, although the moment of greatest tension occurred in the spring and summer, the main cause of the tension itself was, all things considered, the failure to clarify relations between the two regimes during the talks of January 19-20. Hence the persistence of mutual mistrust and resentment, Mussolini's efforts to escape as much as possible Italy's now obvious subordination to Germany, and the insistence on both sides on behavior that could only exacerbate mistrust and resentment (even beyond Mussolini's susceptibilityand frustrations) and in relation to which the friction that arose during the operations against Yugoslavia and Greece and their territorial and political reorganization would have been nothing more than another drop in the bucket of a crisis within the Axis that Mussolini clearly perceived and experienced intensely, but did not know where and how to address, or how to resolve, given, on the one hand, Italy's clear inferiority and, therefore, impotence vis-à-vis Germany and, on the other hand, his conviction that Germany would in any case achieve final victory. Hence, once again, the inevitable tightening, after the meeting at the Berghof, of German control over various Italian factories) had already been reported by American diplomats in Rome and at the Vatican since February (see Roosevelt Library, PSF, 57, Italy 1941, W. Phillips to Roosevelt, March 4, 1941; PSF, 58, Italy. W. Phillips, 1941, W. Phillips to Roosevelt, February 17 and March 25, 1941). See DDI, s. IX, VI, pp. 542 ff. (Hitler to Mussolini, February 5, 1941), 617 ff. (Mussolini to Hitler, February 22, 1941), 652 ff. (Hitler to Mussolini, February 28, 1941), 758 ff. (Hitler to Mussolini, March 27, 1941), 762 (Mussolini to Hitler, March 28, 1941), 812 ff. (Hitler to Mussolini,

April 5, 1941) and 818 (Mussolini to Hitler, April 6, 1941). Of all Hitler's letters, the most significant for a proper understanding of the German modus operandi towards Italy is, in our opinion, the one sent to Mussolini on April 5, on the eve of the attack against Yugoslavia. Among other things, Hitler wrote: "I would therefore propose, Duce, that you agree to allow me to address you personally, in the form of 'recommendations' and 'wishes', the general points of view necessary for the complex of operations and the consequent indications. You then, Duce, as Supreme Commander of the Italian Army, would issue the necessary instructions and give the necessary orders. In this way, it is possible to avoid establishing a superior command externally, and yet ensure that the conduct of operations is carried out in a unified manner. The further details would then be determinedcase by case between the commands of theArmy and the Armed Forces. I beg you, Duce, to examine this proposal. It means only an agreement between the two of us and will not appear before the world. My aim is only to win together, and indeed to win quickly and surely, because, precisely in view of the ever-uncertain situation in the East, it is understandable that I will be happy to be able to relieve the German formations as soon as possible of the task that currently falls to them, to withdraw them and keep them ready." See Sme Uff. Storico, La campagna di Grecia cit., I, pp. 564 ff. To closely follow the failed counteroffensive in Vai Deshnicès, Mussolini was in Albania from March 2 to 21 (see ibid., pp. 643 ff.). U. Cavallero kept a detailed diary of this stay, "Viaggio compiuto da Mussolini in Albania" (Mussolini's trip to Albania), accompanied by several documentary attachments and preserved with Cavallero's diary in the Aussme. of Italian diplomatic initiative within increasingly limited margins, to the point of giving the impression that Mussolini now had no other political strategy than to live, more or less resignedly, day by day at the mercy of his ally. This was to a certain extent true and inevitable, but not completely, because until July 25, Mussolini never resigned himself to this condition and, on the contrary, tried to escape it, never giving up on the idea that sooner or later an opportunity might arise to attempt a compromise settlement of the conflict. As long as this seemed to be turning in favor of the Axis, to prevent Germany from winning outright, then to save what could be saved and not be completely dragged down by Germany. Mussolini played no part in the two most important political and strategic decisions of the second phase of the conflict: Germany's attack on theUSSR on June 22, 1941, and, five and a half months later, Japan's attack on the US and Great Britain, Mussolini played no part. He was informed of the former by Hitler in a letter which, on the night between June 21 and 22, Prince von Bismarck, advisor to the embassy in Rome, delivered (Mussolini was in Riccione). He was warned of the second (without, however, being given the exact date) four days earlier, on December 3, 1941, when Tokyo informed the two Axis governments of the negative progress of negotiations with Washington and asked Italy and Germany to also declare war on the US as soon as the conflict began and to sign an agreement with Japan "not to make separate peace." The fact that Hitler informed him of his decision only at the time of the attack does not mean, however, that this took Mussolini by surprise and that the Führer had not warned him in some way, even if he had not been specific about the timing. If the first signs, in July-August 1940, of a change in Germany's attitude towards the USSR and, again, those following the Berlin meetings in November between Hitler, Ribbentrop, and Molotov had not attracted the attention they deserved at

Palazzo Chigi (so that, as has been said, Italy had insisted on seeking a political and economic agreement with Moscow). There is no doubt that by May 1941 Rome was essentially aware of Hitler's intentions, even though Berlin was now avoiding letting anything leak out, was not following up on Italian inquiries, and tended to make the deterioration of relations with Moscow appear less serious than it actually was. According to information gathered by the SIM, recorded by Ciano in his diary under the date of May 14, theGerman attack was to begin on June 15. This information, added to that gathered by the embassy in Berlin, must have convinced Mussolini that Hitler had now decided to put an end to the USSR. There is no other explanation for the fact that, as early as May 30, he went so far as to tell Cavallero not only that he foresaw the possibility of a conflict between Germany and theUSSR, in which Italy could not remain neutral "because it would be a fight against communism," but even that it was necessary to prepare for the establishment of an ad hoc expeditionary force. The same can be said of the inquiries made on June 2, during the meeting at Brenner, by the Italians to obtain more precise information from the Germans on the real situation of German-Soviet relations and, therefore, on when the attack would be launched. Ciano von Ribbentrop responded to the inquiries in very general terms, saying in practice not much more than he had already told him in Vienna on March 25: the "rumors" about an imminent start of operations were "groundless" or "at least excessively premature"; the Soviets had been the first to begin concentrating forces, the German side had "responded" to them "with an equally impressive concentration of forces"; relations between the two countries were certainly no longer what they had been two years earlier, especially after the German guarantee to Romania, but Berlin did not believe that Stalin would commit the "madness" of attacking Germany and, in any case, if the situation had deteriorated, the Red Army would have been "literally swept away" by the German army in a short time' by the German army. With Mussolini, however, Hitler had to be much more open in private. Although nothing appears in the German minutes, this is proven by the letter in which, on June 23, 'Il Duce' replied to the one written to him two days earlier by Hitler to inform him of the start of theattack and the reasons why he had decided to do so. It began with the following statements: in our conversation on June 2 at Brenner, I expressed my opinion about Russia and told you that a radical solution was now needed to solve the Russian enigma: eithermilitary alliance or war. You made me understand that the first possibility was out of the question, since Stalin could never forget the failures of his policy in the Danube-Balkan basin and, with the agreement with Belgrade signed at the last minute and extraordinarily publicized, he had revealed his true intentions. Only the second solution remained, and for this there was only one problem: that of timing. And Mussolini, after his meeting with the Führer, must have thought that a counterattack was close, very close indeed. On June 6, with Ciano, he had referred to the clash between Germany and the USSR in terms that suggest he considered it not only a foregone conclusion but imminent. And, in any case, Ciano's final report from von Ribbentrop in Venice on June 14-15 June, during the ceremony marking Croatia's accession to the Tripartite Pact. It is therefore not surprising that in those very days Mussolini spoke to Cavallero about the 'inevitability' of the conflict and gave him new instructions for the participation of the Italian expeditionary force, which he had told him to prepare a fortnight earlier, and even instructed the military attaché in

Berlin, General Marras, to communicate his decision to Hitler, to whom it had to be transmitted immediately, if in his letter of the 21st he was able to refer to it explicitly 'with a heart full of gratitude'. Mario Toscano drew attention to a number of facts: that no pressure was exerted on Rome by the Germans to induce it to go to war against the USSR, that the German embassy in Moscow, even on the day before the attack, considered Italian intervention unlikely , and that even Ambassador Augusto Rosso did not rule out this possibility entirely, so much so that he felt the need to raise the question in Rome. In our opinion, there are two possible explanations for these facts, depending on the perspective from which they are viewed. One explanation can be found in the mistrust of Italy that existed in German political and diplomatic circles, which was exacerbated in this specific case by Mussolini's willingness inOctober 1940 by Mussolini for the German project to solicit the USSR's accession to the Tripartite Pact in order to divert it from Europe to India, and above all by the fact that, even after the failure of the Berlin talks between Hitler and MolUSSR to the Tripartite Pact in order to divert it from Europe to India, and above all by the fact that, even after the failure of the Berlin talks between Hitler and Molotov, Italy had continued to seek an agreement with Moscow and, with this in mind, had shown itself willing to make concessions (the question of the straits) that Berlin now considered entirely negative. Another explanation can be found, on the contrary, in the combination of two completely different factors: Hitler's certainty that Italy's reliability in the field of anti-Bolshevism was beyond question and the extreme care taken by Berlin (and, in its wake, by Rome) not to let anything leak out to the Soviets, a care that went so far as to limit communications with the embassy in Moscow to a minimum (and, on the part ofmuch less informed Rome). We have dwelled on this marginal aspect of the question because the readiness with which the "Duce" decided to take the field against the USSR and to participate actively in operations against it is a point that is far from secondary to understanding Mussolini's position and in no way contradicts what we have said about his attitude towards Germany and his considerations regarding the future. Once he was sure that Hitler would march against the USSR, Mussolini had no chance of opposing his decision, but he also had no interest in distancing himself from it in any way. In a different situation, if his arguments could have had any influence on Hitler, he would probably have tried to dissuade him, but more to avert the danger of a further strengthening of Germany, since he too was convinced that the Soviets would not be able to resist German power, organization, and military technology (the Finnish-Soviet conflict of 1939-40 was, for him, as for many others, including in the Anglo-Saxon world, a decisive test in this regard) and, from his point of view, the reasons for viewing the extension of the conflict to the east negatively were, all things considered, no stronger than those in favor. And this is despite the fact that there are indications that he was less optimistic than Hitler about the time and energy needed to defeat the Soviet army and bring the campaign in the East to a victorious conclusion. However, this prospect should not have been unwelcome to him ("I would not mind at all if Germany lost many pens in the clash with Russia...), because if this time the Germans had to engage in something more than one of the 'military walks' they had performed until then and which had earned them so much prestige, this would have served to reduce their arrogance and Italy's embarrassment a little. This did not prevent him from realizing that

even if Germany lost 'many feathers' in Russia," a German victory would have further widened the gap, the disproportion between the overall contribution of the two countries to the final victory. In fact, he was well aware of this, but he could not prevent it, and this was one of the reasons why, even before Hitler launched the attack, led him to want to participate in it, so as to contribute militarily to the Soviet defeat and to relaunch his image as a pioneering and unblemished champion (the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact) and fear of anti-Bolshevism in Italy, Europe, and the world. Extremely significant is a statement he made at the Council of Ministers on July 5, which Public Works Minister Gorla, referring to it in his diary, introduces with a no less significant personal note: At this point, Mussolini seems to be talking to himself, and what he says resembles more a soliloquy than a communication. He says: "There is a problem that haunts me and to which my mind often returns: after the German victory over Russia, will there not be too great a disproportion between the German and Italian contributions to the Axis war? German and Italian contributions to the Axis war? This question is the main reason that led me to send Italian forces to the Russian front. At the same time, I ordered the General Staff to intensify operations in the Mediterranean so that the Italians, and they alone, would defeat the British... Although I am making use of the two German divisions in Africa, I do not want any more because we must fight and defeat them ourselves, and we alone." In this political perspective, Mussolini also justified the attack on the USSR in a way that was slightly different from the Germans: by downplaying itsthe "defensive" aspect of the growing threat of Soviet expansionism and British maneuvers aimed at attacking Germany from behind, as well as the conquest of the "living space" in the east necessary for the complete realization of the Greater Reich, and instead emphasizing the anti-Bolshevik crusade in the name of defending European and world civilization. In his letter of June 23 to Hitler, Mussolini outlined the advantages that, in his opinionwould be achieved by "liquidating the Russian problem": it would deprive Great Britain of its last hope on the European continent; it would free us from any concern in thethe immediate future; it would bring us back to our doctrinal concepts, which only tactical necessity had forced us to abandon, albeit temporarily; it would once again bring together all the anti-Bolshevik currents existing in the world in general and in the Anglo-Saxon world in particular; it could bring a renewed Russia, reduced in size and freed from Bolshevism, back into the circle of loyal economic cooperation with the rest ofEurope and provide us with the raw materials we need, especially if the Anglo-Saxons impose an unpredictable duration of the war on us. There is no reason to doubt Mussolini's sincerity when he wrote these things; but the real crux of the matter for him was another, of which there is no trace in the letter of June 23, but which emerges in two subsequent letters, those of July 2 and November 6: namely, the developments of the war after the liquidation of the USSR. In both cases, these are very brief references: Once Russia has been liquidated, the fate of Great Britain will not take long to be decided, especially if we succeed in bringing Turkey into our camp and attacking Egypt from two sides; Once Russia has been defeated and thus definitively expelled from Europe, the war will take on a Mediterranean-Eastern character... For us, however, these are valuable references, especially when read in the light of what Mussolini said on July 5 at the aforementioned meeting of the Council of Ministers: Hitler did not include the destruction of the British Empire among Germany's war

objectivesBritish Empire; on the contrary, he told me that, in his opinion, England still has an important role to play in the world, a role that Germany would not yet be able to take on. As soon as Russia is defeated, Hitler will make new and advantageous proposals to England to conclude peace, and only if these proposals are rejected will Germany consider the liquidation of the British Empire; and a note dated June 30 , which is very brief and hasty, but whose value, after what we have said in the previous pages about Mussolini's state of mind and his position with regard to Germany (which the Russian campaign did not alter in the slightest and, indeed, radicalized in more ways than one) and the prospects that the course of the conflict seemed to hold for Italy, therefore, his political strategy, seems clear to us: He now hopes for two things: either that the war will end in a compromise that saves the European balance, or that it will last long enough to allow us to regain our lost prestige by force of arms. Added to what we already know about Mussolini's position, these four statements highlight two things in particular. First: that at the time of the outbreak of hostilities against the USSR, the 'Duce', as far as he was directly concerned, attributed to this new chapter in the war a value that was essentially functional to his idea that the conflict could (and, in Italy's interests, should) end with a compromise peace: liquidating Bolshevik Russia was, for him, equivalent to depriving England of the only card it could still count on on the continent and, at the same time, earning the Axis merit and sympathy in circles and countries that were resistant or hostile to it and, therefore, discouraging the British from persisting in a war to the bitter end. Second: that, precisely in this perspective, Mussolini's urge to commit himself fullyto commit himself fully not only to inflicting as many blows as possible on the British while the Germans were busy in the east, but also to convincing Hitler that, once the USSR had been defeated, in order to induceEngland to agree to a compromise peace, it was necessary to strike it hard in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. This was all the more so because he knew full well that the occupation of Crete, while a great military and prestige success for the Germans, had made Hitler realize the extreme difficulty and enormous risks of repeating a similar operation on a much larger scale against England, so that the danger for Mussolini was that Germany, having liquidated the USSR and got its hands on its economic reserves, would not press the British on the only possible front, that of Africa, but would concentrate entirely on submarine warfare, so that if Italy reached a compromise peace or a "totalitarian" victory, it would have very little chance of securing the territorial guarantees necessary to achieve its Mediterranean objectives at the peace table. A year of war had forced Mussolini to come to terms with a reality very different from what he had imagined and to revise, to a greater or lesser extent, almost all the convictions that had led him to enter the war, first and foremost that, given the short duration of the conflict he had initially envisaged, his participation in it would be largely independent of German objectives. However, this did not lead him to seriously consider the possibility of either a final defeat final defeat, nor that the war, even if it went on longer than he expected and turned out to be more and more different from what he had planned, could drag on so much that Italy would have to put in so much effort just to survive that it would have to totally give up any idea of a "parallel war," even though the defeats in Greece and Africa really hurt its chances of happening. Mussolini totally got that, and it made the Germans more and more the real ones calling the shots in Italy, both now and in the future.

Even though it might seem weird to us today, the war spreading to the east in June 1941 day more than the Germans the true arbiters of present and future Italian affairs. Despite this, as paradoxical as it may seem to us today, the extension of the conflict to the east in June 1941 was still seen by Mussolini above all in the perspective of a relatively short and, all things considered, fairly traditional war, which would end at the negotiating table and which, while causing great upheaval in all fields, would not bring about the end of an era and a centuries-old ethical-political system, but only its reform. From this perspective, even the possibility that the attack on the USSR could lead to US intervention in the conflict was a secondary issue for Mussolini. First of all, because he was convinced that Roosevelt would sooner or later bring the United States into the war anyway, and secondly because he believed that the Russian campaign would be over before the US was able to actively participate in the conflict: until then, their contribution would not have been very different from what they were already giving with their aid to England. Mr. Roosevelt, he wrote to Hitler on June 23, cannot, even by formally declaring war on us, do us any more harm than he has done so far. The declaration would therefore have the purpose of raising the morale of the British, which is very low, but the effect of this excitement would be short-lived. Not to mention that the fact that Roosevelt had not seized the opportunity of the attack on the USSR to enter the war was interpreted by him as further proof of the difficulties this had caused for the enemies of Germany and Italy with regard to the more decidedly anti-Bolshevik sectors of American public opinion . This led him to believe that American intervention would be "put on hold" and perhaps even to hope that, thanks in part to the Japanese threat in the Pacific, it might not happen at all, despite Roosevelt's firm determination to the contrary. The idea that the extension of the war to the USSR could, if not change, certainly profoundly alter the whole picture of the conflict and make it much longer and such as to entail for the Axiscommitment of men and resources that had not been foreseen in Rome or even in Berlin. Until then, despite the fact that the Germans' grandiose successes appeared less decisive than Hitler had expected and the first rumors leaked out about differences of opinion regarding the progress and futurefuture developments of operations between the Führer and his staff (differences of opinion that in December would lead to the dismissal of von Brauchitsch and Hitler's assumption of supreme command himself), there is no reason to believe that Mussolini had serious doubts about the outcome of the Russian campaign. This was partly due to the great respect he had for Germany's military power and the fact that his visit to the Russian front in the last ten days of August and his talks with Hitler on that occasion confirmed this belief; partly because the fact that British and American declarations of solidarity with the USSR did not translate into substantial aid led him to believe, not entirely without reason, that London and Washington also did not believe in the possibility of long Soviet resistance. Between the end of October and the following November, two events caused him to change his mind. First, despite the severe blows inflictedagainst the Soviets, Hitler's plans to wipe out the Red Army within ten weeks, thereby provoking 'a general uprising of the Russian population against the Bolshevik government, which would then collapse, while the German armies would have no difficulty in occupying the economically useful territories, i.e. those between the Urals and the Caspian Sea', and to practically conclude the Russian campaign before

winter, were still far from being realized, so that, in the best case scenario, aneffective victory over the USSR could not be achieved without at least another year of hard fighting. Despite the confidence displayed by Hitler and the German propaganda machine in announcing the imminent victory over the Soviet Union and the simultaneous launch of the great autumn offensive, which, as the Führer stated in his proclamation to the troops engaged in it, was to be "the last titanic blow which must crush this enemy before winter sets in," the British government flatly rejected the "peace offensive" launched by Germany in the first half of October with the aim of putting pressure on British public opinion and, through it, on the government in London to reach a settlement of the conflict, which, according to unofficial British sources, was to be based essentially on the principle that France and Russia should bear the brunt of the conflict, as they were considered to be primarily responsible for it and had been defeated on the battlefield, while Germany would not ask England to make any territorial sacrifices. Although this solution was immediately rejected, the mere idea of it could not fail to arouse Mussolini's apprehension and irritation and, therefore, new reasons for mistrust and controversy towards Germany, as it confirmed once again that the Germans, while continuing to assert the contrary, did not take Italian interests into consideration at all and authorized the most pessimistic predictions even for that if the problem of Berlin's attitude towards Italian claims against France once its own had been satisfied were to arise again. Hence, precisely, the emergence and the rapid taking root in him of a threefold conviction: 1) that the war would be long and increasingly harsh; 2) that, at that point, this was the best thing for Italy: a long war would inevitably lead to a reshuffling of the cards, to new situations and, sooner or later, to new possibilities for compromise between the belligerents, which Italy would hopefully enter into on more advantageous terms more advantageous conditions and with Germany more worn down and less arrogant; 3) that, in this perspective, Italy should make every effort to enable its armed forces and economy not only to meet needs that had not been foreseen until then, but also to finally achieve the military successes (especially in Africa and the Middle East) that it had failed to achieve until then and which were now becoming even more essential, both to contain German encroachment and to avoid being the country at the peace table whose claims would be sacrificed by the other belligerents in the compromise. Alberto Pirelli's notebooks allow us to establish that by the end of October Mussolini had already come to theidea that the war would be "very long." In fact, they show that Pirelli, who had presented him with a memorandum "on Italy's financial effort in the war, the depletion of its resources, and the need for peace to provide us with raw materials or currencies to replenish them (the return of 2.5 million soldiers), a vital space that is truly vital, and Germany's agreement for the development of our industry," Mussolini replied on October 31: The war will be very long. The opportunity will come for us to give the Germans not only effective support (we have already given it) but more conspicuous support. Then we will be able to ask for the just recognition that you demand. Establishing that Mussolini was convinced as early as October that the war would be very long is important for understanding his attitude towards Japan's entry into the war and, consequently, of the United States. Hitler's position on the United States and the possibility of a conflict with it had undergone a significant evolution during 1940-41. In the 1930s, a war against the

United States was not part of his plans. At that time, he believed that it would be a problem for the next National Socialist generation and that it should be addressed not from a Germany-US perspective, i.e., that of two opposing political regimes, but in the broader context of the common interests of the whole of Europe and its African economic system. In 1939, when the German-Polish conflict spread to England and France, 'the US had become the focal point of Hitler's entire war strategy', both because of the weight of its possible direct involvement and because, being unable to bring the war to American soil, Germany did not know how Hitler would admit in January 1942 to theJapanese ambassador Oshima, how he could defeat them. In the early months of the war, Hitler had avoided provoking them by respecting their neutrality, so as not to give Roosevelt and the advocates of intervention any pretext and to have time to force London to negotiate a compromise peace. With the Battle of Britain in 1940, faced with Churchill's firmness, Hitler had considered that the most effective way to avertAmerican intervention was to make London and Washington lose 'hope in Russia' and at the same time play on the Japanese threat in the Far East. These two "deterrent" factors and the fact that, according to the information in his possession, the United States would not be able to play an effective military role in Europe and Africa before mid-1942, still led him to believe that he could end the war before the Americans could be induced to participate in it. From this perspective, the alliance with Japan was intended above all to keep the United States neutral , isolate England, and make peace with it after defeating the USSR. From this perspective, the best-case scenario for Berlin would have been for Tokyo to go to war against England alone, directing its energy toward British possessions in Southeast Asia and posing a potential threat behind theSoviet Union, whose elimination by Germany would in turn encourage the Japanese to commit themselves fully against England. However, this strategic line coincided only partially with that of Japan, which Berlin (like Rome) knew very little about, just as it was even less aware of the profound debate and struggle underway in Tokyo between the various political and military tendencies for its definition. Relations between Berlin and Tokyo had developed from 1935-36 onwards on the basis of very different motivations, as each of the two parties had given them particular meanings, instrumental to their own foreign policy and its various phases. And in the case of Japan, this was not without internal conflicts and divisions. In Japan, the Anti-Comintern Pact had been desired almost exclusively by the army to prevent an agreement between theUSSR and Chiang Kai-shek and to cover its back in China. But the Germans, when they began to consider the opportunity to make it an anti-British pact, initially faced resistance from both the Japanese and the Italians, who at that time were opposed to such a characterization of their policy. For Tokyo, the bridge with Berlin had one main reason for interest at that stage of its policy: its intimidating effect on Moscow. This explains why the German-Soviet pactof August 1939 (signed while fierce clashes were taking place on the border between the USSR and the Japanese-occupied Mongolian and Manchurian territories, in which the Japanese were losing ground, and in violation of the secret agreement annexed to the Anti-Comintern Pact, which stipulated that the two parties would not conclude political agreements with the USSR without mutual consent) had brought the two countries to the brink of a breakup and to the interruption of negotiations for what would later become the Tripartite Pact. This was reached more than a

year later, on September 27, 1940, but, as usual, with partially conflicting motivations. For Germany, which had had to give up its plans to induce England to make peace for the time being and was faced with growing American aid to England, the alliance with Japan was essentially intended to deter the US and prevent it from entering the war. For Japan, where German victories in the West had aroused widespread sympathyfor the Axis, strengthened the political weight of the most extremist groups, and set in motion a series of appetites, first and foremost for the Dutch and French possessions in East Asia, but also for the British ones, which it considered economically more important, the Tripartite Pact was essentially intended to pave the way for an agreement with the Soviet Union (which was initially viewed favorably in Berlin as well in Berlin, but which, after the failure of negotiations between Hitler, von Ribbentrop, and Molotov in November, would become a source of conflict with Tokyo) in order to proceed with the definitive liquidation of the war in China and to be able to expand southward, without, however, entailing the risk of a conflict with the United States. Thus, after the failure of the November negotiations in Berlin between the Germans and the Soviets and the deteriorationof the American attitude towards Japan as a result of the conclusion of the Tripartite Pact, the latter lost interest in it and downgraded it to nothing more than a means of exerting pressure to pursue its own policy independently. So much so that, on the one hand, it had entered into direct negotiations with the USSR for a treaty of neutrality or non-aggression (concluded on April 13, 1941) and, on the other hand, it had begun secret negotiations with Washington aimed at reaching a sort of compromise with the US that would allow it to obtain American recognition of its hegemony inEast and Southeast Asia, ready, if the agreement were concluded, to consider the Tripartite Pact a dead letter. The Germans were only briefly informed of these negotiations in early May 1941, when they were already in full swing. In response to protests from Berlin (which in previous months had tried to urge a Japanese attack on Singapore and had even suggested the date of May with the clear intention to coincide with the start of operations against the USSR), Tokyo responded by suspending the transmission of further information. Nor had the Germans behaved any better on their part. Only in the run-up to the attack on the USSR, in early June, did Hitler and, above all, von Ribbentrop leak Germany's intentions to Ambassador Oshima, leaving the Japanese complete freedom to do as they wished, but at the same time trying to lure them with talk of a 'division' of the Soviet Union. However, this advance had no effect, nor did another, more explicit one from Hitler, again to Oshima on July 14 (the day beforethe removal from the government of Foreign Minister Matsuoka, the only prominent Japanese politician in favor of a close alliance between the Tripartite powers), in which the German side had tried to induce Tokyo to accept the idea of specifying the purpose of thealliance in an explicitly anti-Soviet and anti-American sense. Although strong, the anti-Soviet and anti-American groups in Tokyo were not at that time in a position to bring about such a momentous decision for the future of the country, nor could they count on the support of the emperor. The army (and a large part of the political groups in power), apart from their conviction that the Germans, whatever they said, would not be able to knock the Soviets out of action within a few weeks, were not concerned with the occupation of Vladivostok and the Soviet coastal provinces, but with ending the war in China andexpansion in Southeast Asia and, therefore, not to disperse its forces and to find a

modus vivendi with the United States. These were two objectives that participation in the German-Soviet conflict would have made unattainable. This led to a further cooling of relations between Tokyo and Berlin (which would have liked, especially when its armies encountered greater difficulties than expected in Russia, for the Japanese to attack from the east and was very was concerned to note that, thanks to the position taken by Tokyo, the Soviets could instead transfer part of their troops stationed in Siberia to the West), a cooling that would continue until November, when it became clear that the Japanese-American negotiations were doomed to failure. This was despite theentry of Japanese troops into French Indochina (agreed with Vichy) had caused a clear hardening of the US position in negotiations with Tokyo and Roosevelt's decision to freeze Japanese funds in the US and, therefore, the adoption of a sort of trade embargo against Japan. In fact, a real resumption of relations had only been achieved when anti-American tendencies had gained the upper hand in Tokyo and the decision was made to go to war against the United States. It was a controversial and far from easy decision, on which the decisive influence was exerted by the effects of the American trade embargo (which England and Holland had partially joined) on the Japanese economy and the war potential of the Navy. Until then hostile to war against the United States, whose fleet it knew it was inferior to, it now changed its opinion, based on three considerations: that a more favorable international moment would certainly not arise again; that the more time passed, the more the gap in strength would widen in favor of the US Navy; and that by avoiding direct confrontation with theUSSR and, possibly, Tokyo's efforts to mediate between Berlin and Moscow and immediately inflicting a serious blow on the American fleet, it would be a short war. As Peter Herde1 rightly wrote, the Japanese were in fact realistic enough not to delude themselves that they could defeat the United States; their objective was 'to sever the links between the US and Southeast Asia, including Australia, and to block supplies of rubber and tin', and while Germany engaged a significant part of the US fleet in the Atlantic, they would force China, left without aid and supplies from the Western powers, to surrender. 'This tactic was hoped to change the balance of power within the United States, giving new vigor to the isolationists and thus leading the enemy country to quickly sign a peace treaty with Japan." From this perspective, the Tripartite Pact, which until recently the Japanese would have traded without batting an eye with the Americans if they had been willing to come to terms with them, regained its full value for them and became the point of reference on which to leverage the Axis into their conflict with the United States and to try to ensure that Italy and, above all, Germany would not in future sign separate peace treaties with England and America, leaving Japan alone to bear the full weight of their power. Hence, on November 30 (just one week before theattack on Pearl Harbor), the Tokyo government decided to inform Berlin and Rome that negotiations with Washington had reached the point of breakdown and that the chances of an imminent conflict with the United States and England were growing, and to ask them to immediately side with Japan in such a case and to sign bilateral agreements whereby Germany, Italy, and Japan would See p. herde, Pearl Harbor cit., pp. 239 and 431. would undertake not to conclude separate armistices or peace agreements with the United States and England. At this point, Hitler had no choice but to grin and bear it, especially since in the previous months the secret Japanese-American negotiations had raised more than one concern in

him about the reliability of the Japanese, and the latter accompanied their communication and requests with ample assurances that their attitude towards thewould not allow the latter to transfer troops to Europe and even made vague references suggesting that in the future they might even take the field against the Soviet Union. And this was what the Germans now cared about most. Although, given the protracted campaign in Russia, American intervention was now considered a foregone conclusion, Berlin would have preferred it to occur as late as possible and for nothing to be donedone to bring it forward, helping Roosevelt to overcome the last, but not unjustified, resistance and opposition of the isolationists. The only advantages that Germany could derive from the precipitate situation concerned the maritime war, which, was thought to benefit from a reduced American naval presence in the Atlantic and greater freedom of action for German submarines, which would no longer be forced to distinguish between British and American ships. For the rest, US participation in the conflict, in addition to having serious internal psychological repercussions (Pearl Harbor coincided with the Soviet counteroffensive in the Moscow sector), meant the definitive transformation of the war 'from a series of blitzkriegs to a war of attrition, the outcome of which for Germany was now necessarily dependent on total victory over the USSR, so as to be able to dispose of its economic resources, on Japan's ability to engage as many British and American forces as possible, and on its steadfastness, i.e., on Japan not concluding a separate peace but going all the way in the fight to the bitter end. So, to summarize what Hitler's judgment on Japan's decision to attack the United States must have been, we can use no other expression than "the lesser of two evils." Paradoxical as it may seem, Mussolini's reaction was different. to attack the United States, we cannot think of any other expression than "the lesser of two evils." Paradoxical as it may seem, Mussolini's reaction was different. Although there were ups and downs dictated by thethe progress of relations with London, from 1935-36 to June 1940, Fascist diplomacy had looked at Japan not only with different eyes, but with greater attention and interest than Germany had done, aware that coordination between the policies of Rome and Tokyo would create serious difficulties forEngland from a strategic and naval point of view in particular, and to some extent also from a political point of view, as it could have made the Anglo-Soviet rapprochement attempted in those years more difficult. The same can be said about theattitude of Japanese diplomacy. After June 1940, things had changed somewhat, but less than some scholars have claimed. While it is certainly true that Italy's accession to the Tripartite Pact was partly dictated by propaganda and image considerations and was essentially in the wake of German policy, it is less true that Rome had lost interest in Japan. The explanation for what may appear to be a loss of interest in Japan and a more or less passive alignment with Berlin's position can be found in Mussolini's conviction that the war would be over in a matter of months. From this perspective, Japan was an excellent potential deterrent to preventEngland from transferring forces from the Far East to the Mediterranean and the mother country, but nothing more. Mussolini was well aware that if Japan's dynamism were to be directed against England (the Duce never believed in the possibility of a Japanese-Soviet confrontation and, in any case, certainly did not wish for it at that time), this would bring the United States into the war, complicating and prolonging the entire conflict. But this does not mean that Japan had disappeared from Mussolini's political

horizon and that he had, so to speak, delegated the management of relations with Tokyo to Berlin. What we have said about the steps taken by Italy to solicit Japanese help for anti-British Arab nationalist movements, particularly in Iraq, and Rome's efforts to establish contacts with the Indian nationalist movement and to dispelits suspicions towards Japan reveal a reality that is not only more complex but also anticipates subsequent attempts to establish an autonomous relationship between Rome and Tokyo and to involve Japan in a series of issues that Italy would otherwise have had to deal with Germany alone. This was done in full awareness of the underlying mistrust and differences of interest between the Germans and the Japanese on important issues. TheGerman attack on the USSR and Mussolini's growing conviction that the war would be very long had obviously heightened Italian interest in Japan. We say Italian and not just Mussolini's because, while there were those in the Fascist leadership and at Palazzo Chigi who realized the massive impact of US intervention on the outcome of the conflict, many others, starting with Vittorio Emanuele III himself, considered Japan's intervention to be the truly decisive factor. Mussolini never had Hitler's doubts about Japan's military power and the outcome of the situation in the Far East, just as he never thought that Tokyo would sacrifice all or part of its "vital" needs to build a 'new order' in Asia in order to turn against the Soviet Union. The 'Duce' wrote to Hitler in response to his concerns on July 24: 'It is my belief that Japan will remain in our camp, not least because it is forced to do so by the increasingly substantial aid that the United States is sending to Chiang Kai-shek. To begin with, it will not march against Russia, but will occupy Indochina, and this will lead to a break with Washington. He repeated this a month later when he met with him during his visit to the Russian front, almost with a hint of controversy over the schematism on which certain misunderstandings of the Führer were based: ... this country has a complex and troubled internal political situation that is at the root of the uncertainties of its foreign policy. There is no doubt, however, that Japan is fundamentally animated by a nationalistic dynamism that tends to gravitate it towards the Axis and, in a certain sense, has a more linear conduct than Spain. It is very likely that one day it will be in line with the Axis. It is therefore necessary to realistically assess its possibilities in order to judge its current and future attitude. As for the United States, as has been said, Mussolini had already been convinced for some time (see, for example, his statements on the occasion of the Council of Ministers on July 5) that, as he would say on December 1 when announcing the declaration of war on the US from the balcony of Palazzo Venezia, that "authentic and democratic despot" Roosevelt would sooner or later lead them into war by resorting to all his evil arts and an "endless series of provocations" and frauds against his own people. Their attitude was "now very clear," to the to the point that in many respects they could already be considered to be at war with the Axis, so that in reality their full entry into the conflict changed almost nothing: it did not substantially worsen the situation and, from his particular point of view, introduced new "positive" elements. Having now accepted the idea that the war would be "very long," its extension to Japan and the United States only confirmed him in his conviction. On December 27, summarizing the political and military situation in the Council of Ministers, he was even more explicit than he had been two months earlier with Pirelli and then with Ciano on December 3, when Ambassador Horikiri had announced the imminent Japanese intervention. The war, he said,

would be long, very long, longer than the First World War. Perhaps it would last another five or more years, but my certainty about its final outcome was unshakeable. Reporting these words, Gorla noted immediately afterwards: "Mussolini's words are met with absolute silence because, unfortunately, no one shares his certainty." It is virtually impossible to say whether Mussolini truly had "unshakeable certainty" about the final outcome of the war, whether he expressed himself in these terms to try to reassure those who were watching the developments of the conflict with growing concern, or whether he was simply deluding himself. However, Gorla's diary preserves another statement by Mussolini, made just over a month later, which seems to reveal his mental attitude and help us to grasp the link between his conviction that the war would be 'very long' and his belief about the 'final outcome' of the war itself. Reporting to the Council of Ministers on the progress of operations in North Africa, where Italian-German forces had gone on the counter-offensive and in a couple of weeks had turned the situation around by recapturing most of Cyrenaica, Mussolini, according to Gorla, expressed himself in these terms: Recent events have once again confirmed that the fate of the war hangs by a thread. If we had not taken the offensive, we would now be facing the problem of defending Tripolitania, instead we are at the Egyptian border and can look beyond. "The fate of the war hangs by a thread." It may seem, and probably was, a "leap forward," a refuge, if not exactly in the irrational, in the idea that ultimately anything could still happen and that the situation was open to all solutions, to all possibilities, as long as one knew how to seize them. But it was a "leap forward" that had its own logic, its own raison d'être that cannot be ignored. In fact, it was rooted in a culture, in a mentality that belonged to Mussolini and fascism, but not only to them, since they were the product of the relativization and social and political conditioning of all values, moral and otherwise, and of the emergence, on the one hand, of an extreme voluntarism that seemed capable of dominating everything and bending everything to the will and ability of theindividual, and, on the other hand, a sort of 'ethics of destiny' (individual and of peoples) which, in various forms and degrees, characterized and energized the malaise of large sectors of European society at the time. So much so that, returning from the general to the particular, an attitude substantially no different from that of Mussolini can also be found in other figures of the regime and its technical-bureaucratic apparatus, with a different cultural background and whose technical training would at first glance suggest that they should have shunned a vision such as that underlying Mussolini'sMussolini's statement and, therefore, his "certainty" about the final outcome of the war. With regard to the former, we think in particular of Ciano, who, while not hiding his sarcasm about his father-in-law's "too easy prophecy" that the war would be very long, immediately put things in their place by stating that the question should be posed in other terms: "who will have the most stamina?" Without realizing that he was saying essentially nothing different from what Mussolini was saying, except that Mussolini, more realistically than him, was not focusing on "stamina," on a struggle to be decided by the exhaustion of one of the two contending blocs, but onthe decisive moment and on the ability, above all his own, to seize it. As for the latter, a series of considerations dedicated to the military situation in January 1942, preserved in the diary of Luca Pietromarchi, an experienced and well-informed diplomat, a fascist but certainly not blinded by political passion to the point of not realizing the real situation and being unable

to assess its developments and consequences on the future course of the war, are characteristic. The picture was far from positive for the Axis, much better for Japan, so much so that it opened with the statement that 'the forces are in balance': Japan has dealt a severe, decisive blow to the Anglo-Saxon powers by depriving them of their bases in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, but Germany andItaly are on the defensive, under heavy pressure from enemy divisions. However, both Russia and England are finding it very difficult to increase the pressure beyond a certain limit and exploit their success. This general statement was followed by an examination of the three key chessboards. The Mediterranean: As a rule of thumb, our fate in Libya is decided.England has such superiority in terms of armaments that it will only be possible to oppose them with a valiant but limited defense. On that day, the whole of Africa will in fact be in the hands of the Anglo-Saxons and the Mediterranean will be impassable for the Axis. Sardinia will then be in danger. A landing will always be possible in Italy and the Balkans. It will only be attempted when the strength of the German army has been worn down. Then the Russian one, where it is retreating... under the pressure of Soviet forces... No one can predict what will happen in Russia during the winter. It is to be expected that much of the ground gained in the spring will be lost. So far, the retreat has been orderly on the whole, and there are no signs of collapse. And finally, Asia: The position of the third partner, Japan, is clearly favorable... The situation created by Japan, while depriving the United States of America of any possibility of exerting its influence in the Pacific, is forcing England to take urgent measures to ensure the defense of its most exposed dominions, Australia and India. What percentage of its forces will it have to divert from those assigned to Libya? However, today, ships are beginning to sail again in the Mediterranean. And the first repercussion of the Japanese intervention... Hence the final conclusion, which is not so different from Mussolini's, that the fate of the war hangs by a thread: Overall, the situation is very evenly balanced between the warring parties. It is not possible today to predict how the current positions will develop. The decisive factor is the situation in Russia. Here, the forces are currently in equilibrium. Everything suggests that the war will continue for a long time due to the attrition of the continents that are facing each other. Now, when a conclusion is delayed, the imponderables and the unpredictable must be taken into account. Who will they favor? The future is in God's hands. In light of what we have said, we believe we can understand why Mussolini welcomed with such favor, even happiness, according to Ciano, the news of Japan's imminentintervention in the war by Japan with such favor and even happiness, underestimating (or giving thethe impression of underestimating) that of the United States, which he already took for granted. He took no account of the concerns of some of Ciano's collaborators, who apparently proposed trying to dissuade Tokyo from taking the initiative against the US. He dismissed the possibility that Italy, appealing to the defensive nature of the Tripartite Pact, would not declare war on them (a possibility that the Americans themselves seemed willing towilling to favor), and even wanted to announce Italy's declaration of war before Hitler. The extension of the conflict not only multiplied the "imponderables" and, therefore, the opportunities and relative possibilities of inserting themselves into them and finding a way out of the conflict itself (which the 'Duce' no longer believed would involve Italy alone), but it also made Mussolini think that it could, on the one hand, reopen possibilities for his political-military

strategy (especially in the Middle East) and, on the other hand, allow him to regain influence over Hitler by proposing himself as a sort of trait-d'union and mediator between Germany and Japan, with which Rome, in his opinion, had more points of agreement than Berlin and with which, therefore, he could establish a sort of privileged relationship within the Tripartite. Chapter Three 1942, the "long" war: Mussolini's strategy between Italian reality and German politics The setbacks in Greece and North Africa in 1940-41 and then the extension of the conflict to the USSR and the United States greatly reduced, as we have already said, the room for maneuver of Italian politics. The extent to which these setbacks had weakened Rome's prestige, credibility, political weight and, therefore, not its freedom, but its room for maneuver, had already become evident between November 1940 and April 11941, when, largely as a result of the attack on Greece, Yugoslavia's relations with the Axis had first come to a halt on the path of rapprochement that had previously been initiated and then a progressive crisis, destined to end in early April with the German and Italian attack and the dismemberment of Yugoslavia itself. Pressed between sometimes conflicting demands, not least that of reaching a bilateral agreement with Belgrade before it joined the Tripartite Pact "in order to reach a solution to the Italian-Greek conflict-Greek conflict without the intervention of Germany and to rebalance Italy's position within the Axis', Rome had tried in vain to develop its own political initiative towards Yugoslaviawithout the knowledge and in competition with the Germans; however, the only result at the end of February was a sharp warning from Berlin to let it and it alone deal with the Yugoslav question. The attempts to delay German military action against Yugoslavia the following month were no more successful, so that it could first settle or at least rebalance the game with Greece and, secondarily, those to induce the Germans to intervene first against Greece and only later against Yugoslavia, so as to be freer in their own intervention (the Italian fear, which General Simovic also tried to play on in extremis, was that of a Yugoslav attack against Albania to break the encirclement and link up with the Greeks and the British) and thus be able to assert their 'rights' in the Balkans, which Berlin continued to reconfirm but showed unequivocally that it did not intend to respect. Nor had the situation undergone any substantial changes as a result of the successes achieved by the Axis between March and May in North Africa, Yugoslavia, and Greece: the Italian contribution had been (especially in Yugoslavia and Greece) too modest to have any real impact on relations between Berlinand Rome as they had been established at the Berghof, especially since they were followed, as will be seen later, not by a decrease but, on the contrary, by an increase in Italian requests to Berlin for material aid, raw materials, and fuel, which the Germans had no intention of providing or wanted to reduce to the bare minimum. In this context, Rome had to worry more and more every day, rather than expanding its political room for maneuver, about trying to prevent it from shrinking further and all major decisions from being made by Berlin without taking into account Italian views and interests and, very often, even against them. TheThe extension of the conflict to the USSR in June and to the USA in December, and the replacement of the prospect of a short war with the certainty that the conflict would be long and exhausting, had in turn confirmed this situation. In the second half and at the end of 1941, Italian political initiative was thus reduced to very few areas and took on a connotation (apart from the policy towards the Arabs, which we discussed in the previous

chapter) that was wait-and-see approach, i.e., waiting to see how the military situation would develop and what possibilities for maneuver it might open up, and partly a defensive one. Not even Japan's entry into the war and its great successes could, at least for the moment, give the conflict a radically new course or really affect operations in the Mediterranean. For these to take on decisive importance, a whole series of preconditions had to be met, which Italy was not in a position to fulfill or, in any case, did not have the means to fulfill: it was up to the Japanese to ignite the Indian powder keg and open the way to the West; likewise, it was up to the Germans to invade the Middle East from the north and meet them halfway, but first they had to reach and cross the Caucasus, an operation to which the Italians could only contribute to a limited extentby detaching the Alpini divisions from theArmir, as explicitly requested by Hitler to Mussolini, the divisions of Alpini. Italy's task could only be to reach and cut the Suez Canal and proceed further, into Palestine, Syria, and the Middle East. To do so, however, Italy lacked the forces and, above all, the necessary means and fuel, for which it had to resort to Germany. But in 1941, at the most favorable moment to attemptmake the leap towards Suez, Hitler was, as has been said, unwilling to commit himself to the Mediterranean without first putting the USSR out of action. The following year, still convinced that he could succeed, he was unwilling and, in part, unable to divert more than limited resources (too limited, as the Egyptian campaign demonstrated) from the immense struggle in the Easteast. So, in practice, everything was linked, everything depended on the outcome of that struggle. Even the great Japanese successes ended up being little more than propaganda; for the rest, the real relief—and we can only speak of relief—that they gave to the Axis war was minimal. In this situation, Italian political initiative could only be extremely limited, wait-and-see, with a few inane surges in moments of greatest difficulty, as in the case of France, when, between November 1941 and the early months of 1942, the looming British threat to Tripolitania, the maritime transport crisis, and the insufficient capacity of Libyan ports led it to seek, as already mentioned, to obtain from Vichy the use of ports and possibly the Tunisian hinterland to supply the Libyan front. Above all, it was defensive with regard to Germany and its increasingly marked tendency to 'satellize' Italy, to offload a series of burdens onto it and to take away the few political and economic positions it had long held or secured in the Danube-Balkan region following the occupation of Greece and the break-up of Yugoslavia. All this, of course, while trying as much as possible to avoid a collision course with Berlin. The diary of L. Pietromarchi, then head of the Croatia Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has preserved for us, on February 17, 1942, some considerations by Volpi di Misurata and Pietromarchi himself that seem indicative of the illusions that were still being nurtured in Rome at that time about the outcome outcome of the war, but also of the awareness of the particular difficulty in which Italy found itself: Undoubtedly, the situation will improve if the crisis in England and America worsens. "Now I say I am convinced that once again it will be repeated that the Duce was right in deciding to enter the war alongside Germany.". Count Volpi replied: "I believe that the capture of Singapore is a decisive blow from which England will never recover. With the loss of Hong Kong and Singapore, the game in the Pacific is over. What the Americans can do is doubtful. I am very skeptical about their chances because war is not fought only with wealth and material means, but with spirit. Now the Japanese have

material strength and the strength of spirit. Australia is also now lost to England. When I think of the Japanese, I think of swarms of locusts. I saw one for the first time in Morocco. In the morning, I saw the whole country covered with a layer of locusts of that color (and he points to a brown piece of furniture) this long (the length of his index finger), and underneath there was nothing left." The reality is that in Europe, the stakes are being played out in Russia; our very fate depends on the outcome of the struggle between the Russians and the Germans. There is now no doubt that the morale of the German people, that is, the home front, is shaken because people are haunted by the nightmare that the cycle of the previous war will repeat itself: many initial victories and then defeat. There has also been a crisis in the military command, but we know very little about its extent. Unfortunately, Italy has no influence because its position is not decisive, just as what happened in France was perhaps not decisive either. The decisive events are taking place in Russia. Compared to the primary need represented by relations with Germany and in the logic of a long war, the rest lost importance, relevance, feasibility, or presented risks of friction and clashes with Berlin that could not be taken. Typical of the first case are relations with Spain. As long as the Axis victory appeared certain and the war short, Italy could act as a bridge between Berlin and Madrid and represent for the latter a point of reference and aggregation both for its colonial expansion policy and in anticipation of future postwar relations within the European "New Order." After the conclusion of operations against Yugoslavia and Greece, Italy's attempts to convince Madrid to join the Axis proved futile. Even more so after the failure of Hitler's plans to settle the game in the East in a few weeks and after the United States' involvement in the conflict radically changed the outlook and timing of the conflict, the idea inducing Franco to enter the war became, barring new developments, which were completely unpredictable at that time, unrealistic. Rome had almost certainly reached this conclusion by the winter of 1941-42 and probably even earlier. However, it was Serrano Suner who made things clear in mid-June 1942 (who less than three months later would be replaced as foreign minister by Francisco Jordana and would see his hopes of being appointed ambassador to Rome dashed, two facts that clearly show how Spain was now determined to maintain strict neutrality as far as possible) during a series of talks with Ciano in Livorno. Taking his cue from Franco's plans for the restoration of the monarchy and the weak roots that, in his opinion, the Falangist regime still had in the country ("Spain's fortune is the world war. This enormous event keeps the Spanish people in a state of suspenseand prevents them from taking initiatives in national politics. If there were no war, Franco would already have had great regrets"). the Spanish minister was in fact explicit: Madrid could only adhere to a policy of neutrality. Spain, Ciano summarized in a note written at the conclusion of the talks with his Spanish colleague, can only maintain its neutrality, and even Serrano, who had always dreamed of the moment when his country would be allowed to play a decisive role in the future, was now convinced that Spain lacked the most basic material and moral possibilities moral means to participate in the conflict. The country is morally divided on every issue and, first and foremost, on participation in the war. There is a great deal of sympathy for the Axis, but there is also a great deal of sympathy, and not secondary sympathy, for the other side. So if one day events force Spain to enter the fray (and this could be an American occupation of French Morocco), Spain will have to draw its

sword, but otherwise, no, at any cost. Serrano says he knows full well that the Germans were resentful that Spain did not agree last year to the German plan to attack Gibraltar. The Germans are wrong: they do not realize that if the Reich's troops had entered Spain, even with Franco's approval, the whole country would have risen up and they would have found themselves facing an insurrection of such proportions as to dwarf the difficulties and the guerrilla warfare in Russia. The desire of the Spanish people can therefore be summed up in a single word: neutrality. Faced with this attitude from Madrid, for the Axis and even more so for Italy, the Spanish card, at least for the moment, lost its importance. And in fact, in Italian-German conversations and in the correspondence between Mussolini and Hitler, the Spanish question ended up being almost completely relegated to the minor issues. It regained importance at the end of 1942, but in a substantially different perspective from that which it had had until then, when the Allies landed in French North Africa. * As Mussolini said in the Council of Ministers on November 21, the internal situation in Spain was such at all levels, including the military, that "on this side... we must not expect anything good." In this situation, Spain had to be supported to prevent the tendencies favorable to the Allies prevailed and, as the Germans did to some extent, supplied with weapons to strengthen its position against possible Anglo-American pressure, but it was not necessary to "lift a finger to accelerate Spain's intervention in the war" as some German and Italian military leaders would have liked, who were thinking of a counteroffensive in North Africa via Gibraltar "because it would be more of a burden than an advantage." Significant in this regard is the letter he wrote on February 14, 1943, to the "caudillo" in response to the one the latter had sent him through the new Spanish ambassador in Rome, R. Fernández Cuesta. After some pleasantries, Mussolini outlined the military situation: the initiative on land and in the air has passed to the Anglo-Saxons;the maritime initiative, with submarine warfare, remained in the hands of the Axis and inflicted serious and increasing losses on the enemy, such as to influence the development of the land war. The land war was dominated by the Russian advance towards the west and the situation in Tunisia. The enemy's plans were now known: to eliminate the Axis from North-Africa; occupy the Mediterranean islands of Pantelleria, Crete, and Rhodes; and from these bases set out to create a second front in the most suitable location: Greece and the Balkans, all accompanied by massive bombing of Italy and commando attempts in Sicily and Sardinia. After that, reassuring Franco that "naturally, the Axis is preparing countermeasures in each of these threatened sectors," he came to what what was the real problem for him: As for Spain, you are as right as ever. The Anglo-American guarantees are worthless. The Allies have been and are the accomplices of Negrin and the Reds. Given the chance, they will not hesitate for a minute to create all possible difficulties for you, even to the point of provoking war. They make no distinction between fascism and Falangism and National Socialism. They cannot tolerate an authoritarian regime in Spain, but above all they do not want a strong and united Spain, capable of playing an important role in world politics. Arm yourself, therefore, dear Franco, calmly and decisively. The war will still be very long, and if you are forced to intervene, you will do so at the most opportune moment for our cause. As for British policy, I share your opinion. The British delude themselves that they can tame Bolshevism; it is Bolshevism that would dominate them if Russia were to win. But this will not happen. It is my belief that

Germany has sufficient forces to halt the current Russian offensive at any given moment and to go on the counteroffensive in the near future. As we shall see in a later chapter, it can be ruled out that at this time Mussolini believed what he stated in thelast paragraph. In writing it, he probably thought he could prevent Franco from making 'false steps' and was thinking even more of Hitler, to whom he sent, via von Ribbentrop, a copy of Franco's letter and his reply and to whom, on March 9, he would write: I believe, Führer, that it was wise to increase the efficiency of the Spanish armed forces with your aid. Spain is still a card in our game despite the fluctuations in Franco's policy, and I believe it could play a very important role on the day it allows us to take the Anglo-American forces in North Africa from behind through its territory. I understand that our enemies fear such a move. By urging Franco not to rush things and suggesting to Hitler the possibility of military action against the Anglo-Americans through Spain, Mussolini was essentially trying to pave the way for both of them toward what he now saw as the ultimate political "Machiavellian" solution to change the course of the war and get thethe Axis, and above all Italy, out of the impasse in which they had ended up: convincing Hitler of the impossibility of achieving victory in the Mediterranean would have led to a different course of events. There would be no British or Americans in North Africa today, only Italians and Spaniards. However, I have done my best, Duce, within the limits of our own delicate situation, to help the Spanish army to cope, at least materially, with such a such threat. The German army has naturally taken all measures for such an eventuality" (ddi, s. IX, X, p. i3i, pp.4*sg.L Responding on March 14 to Mussolini's letter, Hitler made no mention of what the "Duce" had written to him about Spain, unless he considered the issue to be among the "everything else" he reserved the right to discuss with him in person at their next meeting (see ibid., pp. 149 ff. and especially p. 152). Now with his back against the wall, Mussolini returned to the fray on March 26, after discussing the situation at length with Göring, proposing his idea again with greater vigor and detail. And once again, he linked it directly to the need to close, in one way or another, "the Russian chapter." But this time he added a vague, though clear, reference to Italy's now otherwise unsustainable situation in Italy: "We must recognize that the Anglo-American landing in North Africa was a fortunate move in that it created a new strategic situation, which allows us to consider plans that would previously have seemed fantastic: namely, the invasion of the continent. I have no doubt that these plans exist and that the enemy is preparing to carry them out. Now we have the opportunity to convert what was a fortunate and a fortunate and easy undertaking into a catastrophe that could have incalculable consequences for the development of the war, especially in the United States. For the Anglo-American expedition to North Africa to become a catastrophe, it is necessary to:) resist in Tunisia to the utmost. And it is to make this resistance possible that I have made the urgent request for air reinforcement; to strike the Anglo-Americans from behind through Spain and Spanish Morocco; at the same time, occupy the Balearic Islands to give the Axis absolute control of the western Mediterranean. On the day the first German armored unit reaches the rear of Gibraltar, the British fleet must retreat and cannot go to Alexandria if we still control the Strait of Sicily. Even without conquering the Rock of Gibraltar, we would have long-range gunsand with our aircraft we would also have control of all the Atlantic ports that are currently used by the Americans. With supplies blocked, the fate of the Anglo-French-

American troops would be sealed. What I am proposing is a bold move, but you have shown too much audacity for this not to interest you. And besides, since Roman times it has been said that fortune favors the bold. The question remains: what will Spain do? Nothing. It will not oppose us because it cannot. It will not oppose us because such a maneuver is also to its advantage. Spain will let us do it. After all, Spain knows that the Portuguese Azores have been practically occupied by the Anglo-Americans, and it is now clear that there is a danger that the Anglo-Americans will land in Portugal, where, after all, theenemy aircraft regularly stop over. This maneuver, which should naturally be carried out swiftly, would give the Axis back the initiative in that sea, which will be decisive for the outcome of the war, and allow Italy to march unwaveringly with Germany to the end. Now Italy has resisted and continues to resist the pressure of two giants, plus the French, but I believe that you are the first to realize that a defensive position, without any possible initiative, is sooner or later doomed to exhaustion" (ibid., p. 200). in the east and the need, therefore, to take advantage of the very serious losses that the continuation of the conflict was causing the Soviets and the mistrust that Moscow harbored towards London and Washington, or to stabilize the front in the east (by having the German army assume a defensive position of mere containment behind a fortified system that would allow the transfer of the bulk of its forces to the west) or, better still, to reach a compromise peace with the Soviet Union, so that all German war efforts could be concentrated in the Mediterranean basin against the Anglo-Americans and thus, together with Japan, finally defeat them. Extremely significant in this regard is that in the same letter of March 9, just a few lines after those dedicated to Spain, he went on to discuss the situation on the Russian front, expressing himself to Hitler in these terms: Russian front. You can well imagine, Führer, with what attention and passion I have followed the events of the latest operations on the eastern front. I never doubted for a single moment that the armed forces of your Reich would restore the situation. The heroism of your soldiers, which you document through the losses suffered by the SS divisions, has been universally recognized. The effort that Germany is preparing to make after your appeal is truly unique in the history of peoples. I am therefore sure that at some point the Bolsheviks will find themselves facing an insurmountable wall. But on the day when, Führer, you have built the eastern wall with men and works, Russia, exhausted of strength, will no longer represent the mortal danger it did two years ago, and unless you are absolutely certain of destroying its forces once and for all, I wonder if it is not too risky to repeat the struggle against the infinite, practically unreachable, and elusive space of Russia, while the Anglo-Saxon danger increases in the west. On the day when, in one way or anotherRussia is eliminated or neutralized, victory is in our hands. But I promise to speak to you at length on this subject when I have the good fortune to meet you again. We will return in greater detail to the efforts of the "Duce" to convince Hitler to resolve the conflict in the east in some way in order to win in the west. What we are interested in highlighting here is that if, on the one hand, Hitler proved completely deaf to them, on the other hand, Mussolini's proposal had no chance of finding an audience even with Franco. Still reeling from the trauma of the civil war, what frightened Madrid most was the idea of a Soviet victory, the consequences of which the British would be unable to contain and which would have immediate repercussions in Spain. Thus, unlike Mussolini, the vast majority of Franco's leadership, for

whom Spanish diplomacy worked, aimed at a resolution of the conflict based on an Anglo-German agreement with an anti-Soviet function. Other solutions for Madridthe vast majority of Franco's leadership group and for which Spanish diplomacy was working was a settlement of the conflict based on an Anglo-German agreement with an anti-Soviet function. There were no other solutions for Madrid, and in any case, they would have been too long and difficult to bring to fruition and very risky, because there was no guarantee that the conflict in the East, if settled, would not reignite while the one in the West was still ongoing or lead to a new Nazi-Soviet pact that would have seen the triumph of two very different ideologies, both anti-Christian and therefore contrary to the deepest ideals of Spain and the interests of Franco's ruling class. Certainly less important, but not without significance for understanding the condition of inferiority with respect to Germany (and, therefore, the impossibility of taking political initiatives of its own that were unwelcome to Berlin) in which Italian diplomacy found itself in the last half of 1941, are the relations, especially during 1942, with Hungary, a country which, despite some failings, could rightly be considered Italy's main point of reference in the Danube region and the oldest and most loyal friend of Fascist Italy. Since April 1941, when it had been forced by the Germans to participate in the attack on Yugoslavia and then on the USSR, Hungary had been troubled by a deep internal malaise, to which the Germans to participate in the attack on Yugoslavia and then on the USSR, Hungary had been troubled by deep internal unrest, contributed to the heavy losses suffered by its troops on the Russian front and the attempts by the Arrow Cross Party to seize power, the growing difficulty of containing German political and economic interference, the increasingly marked hostility of Slovakia, Croatia, and above all Romania, which was far from resigned to the loss of Transylvania sanctioned in Vienna by theItalian-German "arbitration," and concerns about the future, about what, in concrete terms, beyond German continental hegemony, the "New Order" would mean for Hungarian tradition and national sentiment. In the context of this deep unease, large sections of the Hungarian ruling class were increasingly looking to Italy, which they considered a factor of mediation and balance (especially for the future) and, in those circumstances, less distant and hostile, due to its 'Mediterranean and Catholic' culture and mentality, than the countries surrounding Hungary. So much so that in August 1942, following the sudden death of Vice-Regent István Horthy and fearing that the Regent, Miklós Horthy (father of the deceased), would appoint his own grandson, still a child, to replace him, thereby causing a constitutional conflict that could have turned into a serious political crisis with unpredictable outcomes and further opening the country's doors to the Germans, Prime Minister Kallay and Foreign Minister Kanya turned to Ciano, who had traveled to Budapest for the regent's funeral, to sound out Italy's attitude towards a possible offer to Victor Emmanuel III of the Crown of St. Stephen in the form of a personal union between Italy and Hungary, which would have allowed Admiral Horthy to remain in power during the regency. Faced with this idea, Ciano, who in other times would have welcomed it with enthusiasm, immediately showed himself to be very cautious and concerned about how it might be viewed in Berlin ("It is clear," he said to Kanya, who had explained it to him, "that given our alliance with Germany and the world situation, we do not intend to make any move that has not been previously agreed and approved by the Reich government") and

how it might affect the Croatian question ("It seems to me that the creation of a personal union between Italy and HungaryHungary would immediately raise the issue of territorial continuity, and this could only be achieved through a radical solution to the Croatian problem"). Then, back in Rome, he discussed it with Mussolini, who immediately opposed it for fear of German reactions ("Hitler... would hold it against us and make us pay dearly for it as soon as possible"), he dropped the idea without even sounding out Berlin. However, avoiding a collision course with Berlin was not always so easy, both because of the Germans' behavior and because there was not always uniformity of approach on the Italian side (particularly among the military, diplomatic, and party circles) and, finally, because Mussolini's own attitude, oscillatingdepending on the moment, the issues, and his mood, between the opposite poles of submissive realism and deep irritation, did not facilitate the establishment of a unified approach and a consistent modus agendi towards the Germans in general and the various problems that made up the fabric of relations between Rome and Berlin. It is certainly not possible to go into all these issues here, but it is appropriate to mention two given the impact they had on Italian-German relations and given that, better than others, they help to focus on Rome's position, and in particular that of Mussolini, the concerns raised by the German attitude and the efforts to try to counter or change it. The first relates to the political, economic, and military situation that arose after the occupation and dismemberment of Yugoslavia in the territories that had constituted that country; the second, more general, concerns German policy in the occupied countries and, in perspective, the post-war 'New Order', its characteristics and its political philosophy. Both German and Italian policy towards the newly formed Kingdom of Croatia and the other former Yugoslav territories have been the subject of research and studies of various kinds and scientific levels; equally well known are the main reasons and moments of conflict between Berlin and Rome are also fairly well known. Our account will therefore be more summary in the first case than in the second, which has been less studied and, on the Italian side, practically ignored. Among the Italian occupation zones, Yugoslavia was certainly not only the most costly from a military point of view (from the second half ofApril 1941 to September 1943, the losses in dead and missing alone amounted to about 16,000 men), but also the one that caused the greatest political problems in Rome, both locally and with Berlin. This was despite the fact that, in theory, Italy's predominant influence over the part of the country not directly annexed to Germany, Hungary, and Bulgaria should have been beyond question, and despite the fact that Rome had expected considerable advantages, especially economic ones, from the territories under its occupation. To summarize as much as possible, it can be said that there were three main causes of the difficulties that Italy immediately faced in Yugoslavia. First of all, those directly deriving from its clear inferiority to the Germans and the latter's desire to take advantage of this to take back as much as possible in practice what had been conceded in theory, to secure the classic lion's share, leaving the Italians only the crumbs of what Yugoslavia could give to the Axis war economy and at the same time offloading as much of the military burden as possible onto the Allies (repression of the partisan movement) and political hostilities (of the Zagreb government) and popular hostilities. Secondly, those arising precisely from the difficult relationship that immediately arose with the Ustasha government over a whole series of issues, starting with those of a

territorial nature. And, finally, those arising, on the one hand, from Italy's total unpreparedness to deal with the political and economic problems facing Rome and, on the other hand, from the diversity of approaches that, in this situation, were pursued or advocated by the various central and local bodies that had a say in Italian policy in Yugoslavia. The state of economic interests not only in Yugoslavia but throughout the Danube-Balkan region of Germany and Italy and their political implications in view of both Italy's foreseeable objectives and their development in relation to the future 'German economic space', had long been the subject of in-depth studies and assessments in Berlin. Among these studies, the one written by Ulrich von Hassel in January 1941 is particularly significant for us. In it, the former ambassador to Rome, writing at a time when the break-up of Yugoslavia was not yet on the agenda, after defining south-eastern Europe as the area 'in which themeeting of German and Italian economic activity in the presence of an undoubted economic prevalence of German interests," he argued thatthat, in order to avoid unnecessary and harmful friction between the two allies, an agreement with Italy was desirable, but one that was far removed from what Rome had in mind. Germany was attributed influence over Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, while Italy was attributed influence only over Greece. As for Yugoslavia, the "particularly critical point" of the entire "agreement," German economic interests were "very strong" and "significantly more important" than Italian ones. This made it unthinkable to attribute it to the "Italian economic space" or to divide it economically ("by attributing Croatia to Italy and the remaining parts to Germany, for example"), so von Hassel suggested a sort of economic condominium: an "equal collaborationin which "external equality would be rendered harmless by Germany's de facto superiority," but would serve to dispel the Italians' idea "that they are simply destined to be played off everywhere," while at the same time protecting the Germans from "the danger of an excessive advantage in their favor." Once Yugoslavia was occupied, however, these scruples were largely abandoned, and the Germans immediately launched a massive, widespread action to penetrate the economy and hoard Yugoslavia's natural resources, completely ignoring Italian interests, even those explicitly recognized in the past, and often without even bothering to save face. Thus, at the aforementioned meeting in Vienna on April 21-22 April, von Ribbentrop recognized Italian "rightsover Dalmatia and Montenegro, but raised objections to Albania's "excessive" claims, hiding behind Bulgaria's claims to part of the territory requested by Italy for Albania and inhabited by Albanians (while on other issues concerning Italian "living space," the Germans tended to limit Italian demands by appealing to the principle of nationality), and, more importantly, moved to transform Italy's "free hand" over Croatia, which he himself had granted in writing in March 1939, into a much less demanding "political disinterest" on the part of Germany in Croatia, which would not have hindered German economic penetration and would, in this way, inevitably have led to Berlin's political influence entering through the window of Zagreb, which had been formally left outside the door. And, in fact, Germany immediately began a political penetration of Croatia parallel to its economic penetration, with the dual purpose of supporting and facilitatingthis and to counter Italy's hegemony over the new Ustasha regime, leveraging widespread anti-Italian sentiment among Croats and, above all, the disappointment and resentment of the Ustasha leadership over the

territorial arrangement imposed by Italy in Dalmatia (in which Berlin had avoided taking any part, taking care to let Zagreb know that it had tried in vain to convince Rome to show greater understanding of the internal political needs that had led Pavelic to request a less burdensome arrangement for Croatia), for the controversial definition of the border with Montenegro, and for other minor issues pending between Rome and Zagreb. The diary of L. Pietromarchi, who played a very important role in Yugoslav policy at Palazzo Chigi in 1941-43, is rich in valuable notes on this subject from the first days following the capitulation of Yugoslavia; sometimes detailed (such as this one dedicated to the German veto on the annexation of Mitrovica and Tesovo to Albania: "The Germans want to secure possession of the Trepka mines, which supply large quantities of lead and zinc and are located north of Mitrovica, as well as the rich chromite deposits west of Skopje. They have declared that these mines had already been purchased by them and that therefore there was no need for Italy to insist on possession of those territories"), sometimes more general and summary in nature, such as this one dated May 1: "The Germans, who already account for 80% of Croatia's trade, will be the masters of the country.". Another series of notes along the same lines is contained in a report that the president of the Stefani Agency, Manlio Morgagni, returning from a trip to Zagreb, delivered to Mussolini at the end of May 1941 and which was probably the source of the "violent anti-German outburst' reported by Ciano in his diary on May 301. The report2 stated in no uncertain terms that Italians were 'politically, propagandistically, and economically' 'practically absent' in Croatia, while the Germans were carrying out 'feverish activity' aimed at 'gobbling up the best positions in the new state': German capital, wrote Manlio Morgagni, arrived there, one might say, alongside the occupying troops and has already secured prominent positions in important Croatian companies. Where it was not able to conquer them immediately and directly, it did so by putting pressure on the Croatian leadership. The Germans are present not only with a magnificent general staff, but also with numerous propaganda technicians, economic representatives, special envoys, journalists... After creating a new German daily newspaper in Zagreb in just a few days, the "Deutsche Zeitung in Kroatine," they are working hard to secure half of the shares in the local agency "Velebit." It appears that over a thousand German secret agents are scattered throughout the country, not counting the overt and covert organs of the Gestapo. Thanks to this twofold massive action of economic and political penetration, by the second half of 1941 Germany had secured a much more solid and influential position than Italy, so that the initial expectations and related Italian plans for economic expansion and the use of Croatian natural reserves to alleviate the Italian economy's dependence on the German economy3 were, despite all the efforts made, drastically reduced and, in some cases, met with a real debacle, to the point of transforming, in Ciano's words, the Italian-Croatian problem into an "Italian-Germanic problem," with respect to which, however, Rome had very little room for maneuver ("it is a contentious issue, but we neither want nor are able to make it so") and had to resign itself to accepting the justifications and assurances that the Germans gave it from time to time to keep it quiet and take advantage of it. See G. Ciano, Diario cit., p. 518. ACS, Stefani Agency, Manlio Morgagni, b. 68, phase. 9, "Report to the Duce Trip to Zagreb from May 16 to 20, 1941." See for initial information E. Colletti T. Sala, Le potenze dell'Asse e la Jugoslavia cit., pp. 167 and

Ciano at the end of November 1941, during which, after the Italian minister had "spoken clearly about Croatia," his interlocutor hastened to reassure him that "nothing had changed on the German side" ("Croatia is and must remain an area of Italian influence"). Of course, it could not be ruled out "that German elements may have worked locally in another direction, but they are not authorized persons and are acting without and against instructions"; if the Italian side had provided "indications and evidence," he was prepared to punish them. So the Italians had no choice but to make the best of a bad situation, or, like Ciano, hope and meditate on a beau geste that they could never have accomplished: Everything depends on the Germans: if, as it seems, they keep their commitments that Croatia is an Italian sphere of influence, much can still be done by us. If, on the contrary, they resume forcing the issue and pushing forward their their penetration, we will have no choice but to fold our flags and go home. Or we could hope for a completely improbable change of course by Pavelic that would lead to a loosening of Zagreb's dependence on Berlin and a rapprochement with Italian positions. This hypothesis is even more unrealistic than that of a German "repentance," both because of the widespread hostility among Croats toward Italy, considered the oppressor of the "Dalmatian brothers" and the friend and protector of the hated Serbs, and because among Germany's strengths within the government and the Ustasha party there were numerous elements (mostly former Austrians and Dalmatians) who were fiercely anti-Italian. It is also very likely that Berlin, thanks to its dynamism, organizational skills, ruthlessness, and above all its political weight and freedom of maneuver, which Rome lacked, would have taken control of Croatia even if Italy had not demanded the cession of part of Dalmatia or had at least accepted some of Pavelic's demands (whose position, moreover, Mussolini realized it was not in Italy's interest to weaken, both to avoid throwing him completely into the arms of the Germans and to avoid pave the way for any competitors even more closely linked to Germany than he was) and, in particular, that of renouncing at least Split. However, it is difficult to dispute that the Dalmatian question contributed significantly to reducing Italy's potential influence over Zagreb (which, for its part, only partially respected the commitments it had made in the agreements signed with Rome, partly because it was well aware of how unpopular they were among Croatians, and if, in 1943, it agreed to greater collaboration with Italy, it did so above all to try to rebalance to some extent the increasingly heavy burden of the German economic presence) and to add fuel to the fire of Croatian and Ustasha nationalism, which was already virulent like few others. A fire that in the summer of 1941 flared up in the most barbaric and bloody ways against all sorts of enemies^ Serbs, Orthodox Christians, Jews, political opponents of all kinds,2 depriving Pavelic's regime of any moral basis and contributing decisively, together with the start of the conflict in the East, which, on the one hand, activated the Yugoslav communists against the Axis and, on the other, triggered solidarity among the Slavic population. propaganda so different from ours, which has always been concerned with reaffirming the strength of our loyalty to the Axis policy! With a recklessness truly inconceivable in a wartime ally, the Germans have, in short, damaged all our attempts to assert ourselves in this country and to get closer to this people over the past year and a half, rendering our efforts largely fruitless and our collaborative initiatives ineffective. They now have Croatia in their hands: economically, because they have taken

over almost all the key positions; militarily, with a latent but effective occupation, not only through military forces, but above all through an army of spies and agitators, reinforced by the minority cadres, under the orders of the German authorities. The German Legation, Minister Kasche himself (not to mention the notorious General Gleise von Horstenau) are the real culprits behind this stubborn and unscrupulous action aimed at removing Italy from Croatia." (acs, Stefani agency, b. 7, phase. 19). To give an idea of the boundlessness of Ustasha nationalism, it is worth noting that Pavelic, when he came to Italy for the first time in May 1941 in his new role as "poglavnik," had no qualms about stating that among the Croatian claims was also that of... Budapest. See L. Pietromarchi, Diary, May 8, 1941 (in the Pietromarchi Archive). In a report on "The political situation in Dalmatia," written at the time of the Italian Social Republic, referring to the "massacres carried out by these barbarians of the twentieth century" in Bosnia, in Dalmatia, which remained under Croatia, and elsewhere in 1941, there is talk of "entire populations" slaughtered and "hundreds of children slaughtered in series" "with the tacit or express consent of Zagreb" and concludes: "the massacres carried out by the Turks against Christian populations have been surpassed in cruelty" (ACS, RSI, Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio rà.,b. 12, fase. 60R, "Situation in the former Austrian provinces").and the resistance and partisan movement took root, putting the Italian political and military authorities on the ground and at headquarters in serious difficulty. Forced to deal with a series of demands for which they were unprepared and which were sometimes conflicting, they found themselves in a situation that was not only militarily and morally difficult (although formally, the Duke of Spoleto had been designated King of Croatia, which made Italy in some way jointly responsible even for events for which it had no direct responsibility), but also politically increasingly untenable, making relations with Germany and Hitler personally more difficult, especially in 1943, for whom Italy's conduct in Yugoslavia ended up being seen as the quintessential example of double-dealing. At first, the line of conduct adopted in the occupied territories was aimed at restoring a certain normality of life, while at the same time avoiding reasons for conflict with the Ustasha: two objectives that were very difficult to achieve together, given that the second made the first unachievable and this thwarted the possibility of achieving the second; so that the prestige and credibility of Italian politics and its claim to isolate the 'communist rebels' in this way were the first to suffer. This was all the more so because, at the same time, the Italians had to worry about keeping the Ustasha at bay in Dalmatia and the Sandžak and monitoring the Germans in Slovenia and, in their wake, the spread of underground propaganda claiming all the provinces on this side of the Alps that had belonged to Austria-Hungary until 1918 for the Greater Reich. With the spread of the resistance movement, while the Germans, careful to withdraw only the forces strictly necessary from the Russian front, limited themselves to securing control of only those areas they considered (generally for economic reasons) most important to them, the first cracks began to appear on the Italian side. Locally, the military authorities began on various occasions to adopt, on the one hand, a less friendly attitude towards the Ustasha (for example, by making it impossible for them to exercise their recognized civil powers in certain areas) and, on the other hand, to proceed with de facto or explicit agreements, depending on the case, with the non-communist resistance, with the nationalists, the

Chetniks, and the bands of Draza Mihajlovic (who was also connected with the Yugoslav government in exile in London), helping and sometimes arming it, provided that it did not attack Italian troops and fought the communists, and pretending to ignore it when it attacked the Ustasha. To understand this attitude, it is necessary to bear in mind a whole series of factors. First of all, the diversity of positions that existed in Rome on this issue. For Mussolini, what mattered was to avoid new reasons for conflict with the Germans and not to further alienate the Ustasha; to protect Italian interests and prestige in the region; and above all, as stated in one of his telegrams dated August 14, 1941, "to put an end once and for all to the state of insecurity in the coastal area, which is therefore prone to all kinds of surprises" and, therefore, to any infiltration by any force ("rebel" but also Ustasha) in the "coastal strip between Fiume and Montenegro.". To achieve this, the "Duce" was initially willing to authorize the Supreme Command to reinforce "to the extent it deemed necessary" "our garrison troops," just as he was ready to give the green light to an energetic crackdown on the occupation policy, establishing (as sanctioned by a proclamation issued on September 7, 1941, by General Ambrosio, commander of the Second Army) the penalty death penalty for all those who had not surrendered their weapons within forty-eight hours of the publication of the relevant proclamation. And, as the situation worsened, he became increasingly convinced that it was necessary to proceed uncompromisingly along this path, responding "with iron and fire" to "the terror of the partisans." Above all, he wanted to commit the Germans to undertaking a joint, thoroughgoing action that would nip any pockets of resistance in the bud, so much so that at the end of 1941 he tried to persuade Hitler to accept his point of view: Every hotbed of revolt must be eliminated before spring. Otherwise, we run the serious risk of having an additional Balkan war in 1942. The first area to be pacified is Bosnia, then Serbia and Montenegro. Operations must be conducted with extreme determination and must lead to the effective and total disarmament of the populations, the only means of avoiding surprises in the future. Here, the collaboration of our armed forces on a common plan is necessary in order to avoid the dispersion of energy and to achieve the desired result with the minimum necessary use of men and weapons. His position on the possibility of agreements with non-communist partisans was more uncertain over time. Instinctively, he was opposed to them, especially as he understood the political risks and was convinced that the military should only deal with military matters and not 'get involved in politics'. As time went by, faced with the worsening situation on the ground, thethe Germans' stubbornness in engaging only in operations limited to the defense of particular areas (which often caused the partisans to flee to those occupied by the Italians), the impossibility of sending new forces across the Adriatic, and even the need to withdraw some of those stationed there to deal with possible Anglo-American landings in Italy (at the beginning of 1943, almost half of the Italian army was engaged in Greece, where there were also fears of enemy landings, and in Yugoslavia), as well as pressure from Palazzo Chigi and the 'practical' considerations of the military, his conviction began to crack and transform, as did others, into a sort of ambiguous position halfway between not wanting to and letting those who believed that there was no other way to control the situation than to use (and help) Mihajlovic's partisans, around whom most of the nationalist and Chetnik bands had gathered against Tito's communists, turning a blind eye most of the

time when the Ustasha and the Germans themselves were also attacked. The idea of a de facto modus vivendi with nationalist groups hostile to Zagreb, but also to the communists, was initially advocated by Palazzo Chigiby the need to counter, first and foremost in Bosnia, but also in the rest of the country, the creeping pro-Serbian sentiment that the Germans were using to weaken Italian positions. However, the Supreme Command was initially opposed to the idea, both because Cavallero knew that Mussolini did not agree with it and because the military leadership was reluctant to take on political responsibility without an explicit mandate., finally, so as not to be accused in turn of "Serbophilia and indeed to dispel the accusations already made in this regard" by the Croats and not lose the'friendship' of the Ustasha. The local commands, on the other hand, were more favorable, and in some cases had already begun to implement it independently. The fact that their civil powers had been taken away from them in a large area in order to meet Zagreb's demands was seen by them as an impairment of their autonomy and prestige and a cause of discontent and revolt for those who opposed the Ustasha regime; and this, moreover, in a situation that was difficult to deal with using the means at their disposal. Hence their favor for a solution which, while not leading to the complete elimination of the partisan movement, would nevertheless have considerably reduced the burden on the occupying forces, allowed them to concentrate their efforts against only one part of the partisans, the communists, to operate in a less hostile and in some cases even favorable environment, and, moreover, to wear down the nationalist forces, leaving open the possibility of proceeding in the future, if the opportunity or necessity arose, even against the nationalists in conditions that were certainly more favorable than those existing at the time. In light of these premises, it is not surprising that, as the situation in Yugoslavia worsened, the resistance became stronger and more active, but also more clearly dividedbetween communists and nationalists. Furthermore, the Germans began to ask the Italians to take over the protection of other areas (those that were more economically interesting to them), and the strategy of "divide and rule" ended up making inroads even at the top of the army, especially after early 1942, General Ambrosio, who was well acquainted with the situation on the ground, became Chief of Staff of the Army, and command of the First Army was taken over by General Roatta, a figure as authoritative as he was realistic, who could hardly believe his luck at being able to offload a significant portion of the enemy he would otherwise have had to face and let the partisans 'fight it out' among themselves.fight it out" among themselves. It is unthinkable that no one in the Army General Staff and the Supreme Command realized that, once embarked upon, this path would not only bring advantages but also lead to serious difficulties with the Germans and the Ustasha. It is more logical to think that their choice was influenced, on the one hand, by the gravity of the situation in Yugoslavia and, on the other, by the fact that, when it was made, Ciano had returned, after the Greek eclipse, firmly in the saddle, so that they had to believe that Palazzo Chigi would in any case cope with any difficulties. This calculation, when put to the test, would prove to be both right and wrong at the same time: right in the early months, until, that is, the modus vivendi was still in its infancy and the Naziwere still not very unified, it did not overly concern the Germans and did not take on political significance in their eyes; wrong when it took on such dimensions that there was no longer any room for uncertainty and Berlin decided to intervene more

and more energetically to put an end to it. The Germans took the first steps in the summer-autumn of 1942, but Rome did not seem to take them into consideration. The issue was then raised personally by Hitler personally with Ciano and Cavallero at the end of talks with them at his headquarters on December 18. Croatia, he told them, was essential to "watch the backs" of the Peloponnese, the Dodecanese, and Crete. Mihajlovic was in contact with the British and was just waiting for "the hour to move"; nationalists and Chetniks were all enemies of the Axis and "brutal action" was needed against them: "Mihajlovic and his Pan-Slavic ideas must be destroyed." He returned to the subject two days later, alternating between harsh tones ("We must therefore destroy the bands in the Balkans immediately.... It is not a question of whether or not it is possible to do this: it must be done at all costs") and persuasive tones ("Germany has no political interest in Croatia: forItaly itself, a weak Pavelic regime is preferable to a nationalist regime that would raise the flag of Pan-Slavism"). A direct consequence of this Hitlerian strategic vision, to which Cavallero was unable or unwilling to respond other than very weakly and accepted without highlighting the difficulties that its implementation would encounter and the problems it would create for the Italians, was the subsequent "Operation Weiss" in January-February Weiss" (in which three Italian divisions also participated, although Roatta had judged it inappropriate given the season and the insufficiency of the forces employed), with which the Germans intended to deal a fatal blow to the communist resistance. Despite some undeniable successes, especially territorial ones, the operation did not achieve the desired result; the bulk of Tito's forces managed to escape the grip of the Axis forces and to flee, in part, towards Montenegro, thus making the help of the Chetniks even more valuable to the Italians. Immediately before the start of "Operation Weiss" and while it was underway, the OKW repeatedly pressured the Supreme Command to ensure that the Italians carried out the round-up and garrisoning of the "cleansed" areas and, in turn, begin disarming the Chetnik bands. To this end, in February, General Warlimont twice contacted General Ambrosio, who had succeeded Cavallero as Chief of the General Staff at the end of the previous month. The minutes of the meetings between the two and those between Ambrosio, Roatta, and Robotti during those same days are extremely indicative of how the Italian military leaders tried in every way to avoid any specific commitment and, in any case, to project everything into a nebulous future. To General Robotti, the new commander of the Second Army, who was about to leave for Belgrade for a meeting with the Germans and Croats, Ambrosio said in no that disarming the Chetniks "was not something to be considered for the time being"; his course of action was to "work with and exploit these people (bread and rations) without any allusion to future political developments." As for General Warlimont, Ambrosio told him, on the one hand, that he was not aware of any commitments made by his predecessor regarding roundups and, on the other hand, that the Chetniks would be disarmed, but "with great tact and not in the short term"; first, the operations in progress had to be completed; and, in any case, "taking into account the political repercussions that such a measure could provoke." Faced with this evasive Italian attitude, Hitler decided to intervene personally with Mussolini. He did so in the most direct manner and in an apparently friendly tone, but punctuated with significant malice, writing to him on February 16 , in which there was no shortage of sarcastic references to the

naivety of the Italians when, in 1940, they had expected revolts in their favor to break out in Greece, nor direct accusations (albeit largely unjustified), such as attributing the fact that the first phase of "Operation Weiss" had not been more successful to the slowness of the advance of the Italian Fifth Army Corps. After a quick glance at the general situation and operations in Africa, the letter went straight to the heart of the matter that was most important to Hitler at that moment: However, Duce, I view the situation in the Balkans with the utmost concern. As tempting as it may be to play two or three opposing parties off against each other, I believe it is equally dangerous to resort to such a procedure when the three parties are in unconditional agreement on one point: namely, their unbridled hatred of Italy and Germany... If a landing were to take place tomorrow somewhere in the Balkans, or Duce, the communists, Mihailovic's supporters, and all the other Comitagi wouldhatred against Italy and Germany... If a landing were to take place tomorrow somewhere in the Balkans, Duce, the communists, Mihailovic's supporters, and all the other Comitagi would agree to immediately attack the German and Italian forces in support of the landed enemies! I believe, Duce, that it is a real misfortune that after we had conquered thethe entire sector, organized armed groups have now arisen through political methods that will turn against us in any difficult situation... I see a particular danger, O Duce, outside the framework of the current operations against the communists, in the developments of Mihailovic's movement. The large number of seriously checked and consistent reports at my disposal clearly reveal that this movement, energetically directed and organized and skillfully guided from a political point of view, is only waiting for the moment when it can attack us with prospects of success. Mihailovic is trying to obtain the weapons and supplies necessary for the execution of such plans by pretending to help yourtroops in pacifying the country. In this way, his formations receive everything they need to then take up the fight against us: weapons, ammunition, provisions, and the necessary room for maneuver. I must, Duce, according to my firm conscience, seriously warn you against continuing such a policy, and I can report to you that in the leadership circles of Mihailovic's movement, extensivepreparations are being made for the annihilation or disarmament of your own forces in Herzegovina and Montenegro, and that Anglo-Saxon attempts to achieve collaboration between the communists and Mihailovic's followers against us are making further progress. In view of the dangers inherent in Mihailovic's movement, I have in any case given orders for the suppression of all Mihailovic's followersin the territories occupied by my forces. I consider it desirable, in the interests of our common goals, that your Second Army also consider Mihailovic and his movement as bitter enemies of the Axis Powers, and I beg you, Duce, to give orders to your senior commanders to this effect. Nor was the intervention limited to this alone: in order to deliver the letter and obtain the prompt adoption of its contents, Hitler sent von Ribbentrop to Rome, who, in turn, deemed it appropriate to immediately inform Alfieri that the purpose of his trip, on which he would be accompanied by General Warlimont (and this too was a significant choice), would be to discuss issues relating to "the Mediterranean area and in particular the problem of Croatia." This problem had already been discussed in December by the Führer and the OKW with Ciano and Cavallero, who had accepted all the German demands, but it had nevertheless remained unresolved, so that it was now necessary to settle it once and for all, especially

since in the meantime both Ciano and Cavallero had left their posts and been replaced by Bastianini and Ambrosio. These were two men whom the Germans had to view with suspicion, both because they did not know them well and because their track records, the former as governor of Dalmatia and the latter as commander of the First Army, were not encouraging from their point of view. Von Ribbentrop stayed in Rome from February 25 to March 1 and had a series of meetings with Mussolini (on February 25 and March 1, also attended by Bastianini, Alfieri, and von Mackensen present, on the 26th, in addition to Bastianini, Ambrosio and Warlimont were present, on the 1st, after the enlarged meeting, a private meeting) and with Bastianini (twice), while Warlimont met separately with Ambrosio at least twice. Although the number of meetings and thecommitment made by the Germans to obtain a frank and rapid acceptance of the requests made by Hitler in his letter were considerable, the results obtained were disappointing. The military had no intention of accepting them. Aware of the now clearly negative course of the war for the Axis, they put the defense of the national territory first, and it cannot be ruled out that the more political among them also wanted to avoid acts that they considered unwelcome to the British, not only from a military but also from a political point of view. Ambrosio spoke clearly to Warlimont. The Supreme Command was aware that partisans and Chetniks were both enemies, but we cannot deal with them at the same time. Therefore, for now, we will use the Chetniks to the extent strictly necessary. As soon as the partisans have been eliminated, we will proceed to disarm them. If we were to do so immediately, the number of our direct adversaries would be much greater than it is now. For the time being, it was not possible to do anything other than arm new Chetnik formations. But it was even less possible to undertake new operations. "If the Balkans are in danger, so is Italy": "bringing more divisions to the Balkans for operations that I do not know how and when they will end" was impossible; if anything, it was more a question of "recovering forces" from that region. He expressed the same ideas at the meeting on the 26th at Palazzo Venezia. Bastianini went even further. For him, too, the general situation had now reached such a point of crisis that it was necessary to reconsider everything from top to bottom; it was necessary to think about giving a precise and positive face to the European Axis system and at the same time to seek a political solution, total or partial, to the conflict. In this logic, he rejected the idea of a large-scale resumption of anti-partisan operations, criticizing the way in which 'Weiss' had been conducted, and even contested the validity of Hitler's assertion that, if the Allies landed in the Balkans, the three groups that made up the Yugoslav resistance would unite against the Axis forces: in his opinion, there was no possibility of agreement between Mihajlovic and Tito. But above all, he made it clear to von Ribbentrop that what appeared to Hitler to be such an important problem was in fact not important at all: the real problem at that point was another, much bigger one, namely "the political problem of the war in all its aspects, both internal and external to the circle of Germany's allies." That being the case, for von Ribbentrop, the key to everything became the compromise that Mussolini would make with regard to the positions of his collaborators. Personally, as we have already said, the "Duce" had been and, all things considered, continued to be opposed to the pro-Axis policy of Palazzo Chigi and the military, even if he had resigned himself to let them do so. However, when the moment of truth arrived, his opinion must have been that the issue was not worth

the risk of worsening relations with Berlin and with Hitler personally at the very moment when Italy most neededGerman help and when he wanted to convince the Führer of the need to shift the entire center of gravity of the struggle to the Mediterranean and to find, in order to make this possible, some solution in the east. Already after Ciano and Cavallero's return from Hitler's headquarters, almost certainly on January 4, he had expressed to Cavallero and some of the commanders of the troops operating in Yugoslavia his conviction that "the Chetnik problem had to be reconsideredconsidered," and if he had not given precise instructions in this regard, it was because Cavallero had convinced him of the advisability of waiting for the German response to Roatta's proposal to use the Chetniks for "Operation Weiss" at least before proceeding with their disarmament. At the end of the month, on the 29th, introducing a meeting at Palazzo Venezia of the senior military hierarchy dedicated to strengthening the armed forces, when he came to talk about the Balkans, he made some remarks that suggest that he too thought at least in part like Hitler. In particular, referring to the situation in Montenegro, he said: "It is calm, but it cannot be trusted because this is only achieved through through political agreements." So it is difficult to believe that when, on February 12, Ambrosio told Kesselring and Warlimont that "on the question of the Chetniks, the Duce agrees with the opinion already expressed, to proceed with a gradual disarmament to begin with operations [Operation Weiss] ultimate operations," the general only wanted to appease them and gain more time without making any specific commitments for the moment, and did not speak knowing that this was now Mussolini's decision. Nevertheless, in his meetings with von Ribbentrop, Mussolini showed himself to be more in agreement with the arguments put forward by Ambrosio than with those put forward by the Germans, so much so that, in the end, the latter were only able to obtain a generic commitment, to be specifiedin subsequent technical meetings. Even in the letter he sent to Hitler on March 9 in response to the one brought to him by von Ribbentrop, he remained vague and even allowed himself a dig at the fact that, when it suited them, the German army also made use of the Chetniks. Minister Ribbentrop will have reported to the Führer that the Chetnik-Partisan issue was discussed at length. We fully agreeWe fully agree that the Chetniks and partisans are enemies of the Axis and that tomorrow, especially in the event of a landing, they would join forces against us and could put us in a very difficult situation. Given that, for the needs of the guerrilla warfare in which, like all Balkan peoples, the Chetniks are particularly suited to guerrilla warfare, several thousand Chetniks were locally armed by the Italian command, and given that these Chetniks have, at least so far, fought very energetically against the partisans, I summoned Generals Robotti and Pirzio Biroli to Rome and gave them the following orders: a) no further delivery of weapons to the Chetniks; b) their disarmament as soon as the partisans have ceased to form a dangerous armed movement (more or less political banditry will always remain a chronic phenomenon in those regions); c) Army General Pirzio Biroli is charged with making contact and agreements with the OKW for further action to be taken against General Mihajlovich's movement, who, although treated as a traitor in partisan radio broadcasts, is still an enemy, given that he is the Minister of War of the Yugoslav government based in London. Nor am I unaware of the plans for territorial revision to the detriment of Italy that this gentleman has been entertaining. I have just received news that the German forces that

came into contact with the Chetnik formations in the upper Narenta Valley have begun to collaborate with them. The Germans have reportedly given the Chetniks cartridges and hand grenades. And from this course of action even after more than two and a half months had passed since von Ribbentrop's trip to Rome without any real change in the Italians' conduct towards Mihajlovic and the Chetniks. On May 19, Hitler sent him a furious telegram that was, from beginning to end, a violent indictment of the Supreme Command and the commands in Yugoslavia (and in particular against General Pirzio Biroli, governor of Montenegro) and an explicit request "to now give the Supreme Command unambiguous orders and to comply not only with the letter but also with the spirit of the agreements that have been set down in writing." His response, three days later, was marked by precisely the formalism that Hitler reproached the Supreme Command for: in practice, a sort of notarial clarification of the state of affairs.... To understand Mussolini's behavior, which seemed to contradict his personal position with regard to Mihajlovic's nationalists, it is necessary, once again, to refer to the particular moment when von Ribbentrop was in Rome and, in particular, to the fact that it was precisely during those days that Mussolini began to stake all his cards and efforts on the idea that the only way out of the dramatic situation in which Italy and the Axis found themselves was to convince Hitler to somehow resolve the conflict in the east in order to win it in thewest, in the Mediterranean. Until then, he had only expressed this idea in vague terms and to a few close collaborators. Hitler's letter delivered to him by von Ribbentrop, the emphatic tone with which the German Foreign Minister read and explained it, echoing the Führer's confidence that he could fight the Soviets indefinitely "until this colossus finally collapsed, with or without allies," particularly irritated him and contributed to his breaking his hesitation and deciding to begin to suggest to Hitler the opportunity to think not only of an increasingly hypothetical elimination of Russia from the conflict, but also of its less risky neutralization. Hence, in the aforementioned letter of March 9 to Hitler, written in response to the one brought to him by von Ribbentrop, he made his first mention of this possibility. From this, he became convinced that despite the seriousness of the military and economic situation, which made Italy increasingly dependent on Germany, Bastianini was right when he argued that the only way to induce the Germans to give greater consideration to Italy's requests for help and political proposals was to a firmer attitude towards them: 'to give Italy back its own personality' and 'make them feel what little weight it had left"; in short, to return decisively to "doing politics" and managing the war not only in military terms and criteria, but also and above all with political criteria: and, therefore, to begin to do so with regard to the controversy with Berlin that was at its hottest at that moment and which, above all, had the advantage of avoiding the risk of a showdown with the army leadership, which he would have found difficult to win, and instead show himself to be sensitive to their arguments. We will discuss Mussolini's attempts to induce Hitler to resolve the conflict with the USSR in some way and to concentrate all the military efforts of the Axis against the Anglo-Americans in the Mediterranean in a later chapter, as we have already mentioned. What we want to highlight now is how the decision to return to "play politics" and take a firmer stance towards the Germans brought to the fore for a moment the other issue we mentioned, which until then had remained secondary to others that made up the intricate tangle of relations between

Rome and Berlin: that of the "New Order" and, in particular, the fact that the course of the conflict did not leave much room for other aspects of German policy in the occupied countries and towards the Allies. This was an issue that may have seemed secondary in the climate of 1943 and, all things considered, Mussolini, who, preoccupied as he was with the increasingly dramatic Italian military situation and his idea of persuading Hitler to resolve the conflict in the East, left it almost entirely to Bastianini to manage, committing himself relatively little and only in the hope that it might somehow influence the resolution of the conflict in the East. However, it is not secondary if one really wants to understand the mechanism of Italian-German relations(at least from 1941 onwards and especially in the crisis of 1943 that led to July 25) and Mussolini's position even in the less obvious aspects of this mechanism, almost on the borderline between the political and the psychological, not least that of the Italian attitude towards the extermination of the Jews carried out by the Germans, and towards the Jews in the Italian occupation zones or refugees there. In the early stages of the conflict, when it was believed that victory was not only certain but also imminent, the problem of the 'New Europe' and the 'New Order' that would govern it had essentially two aspects for Rome. One was territorial: which territories would become an integral part of the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Albania; the other was political and economic (linked to that of colonial expansion and Italy's Mediterranean and African 'living space'): what economic structure and what relations between the economies of the various states, the zones of influence and, more generally, the 'living space' of Germany and Italy would characterize Europe after the victory of the Axis. Pending this, every other aspect was or appeared secondary or irrelevant, especially since Berlin, for its part, showed no desire to enter into any of them, large or small, either so as not to tie its hands in any way in view of possible negotiations with London, or to be free to make its own decisions based on the actual balance of power that would have been established in the meantime. Already clear in 1940 and the first half of 1941, this line of conduct would become explicit after the attack on the USSR; from that moment on, Hitler increasingly entrenched himself in the position of waiting for victory in the east before making any decisions and not making any binding statements until then, either on concerning the territorial and political-economic structure as on the various issues directly related to the future of Europe. Only after victory over the USSR, when there would no longer be any power in Europe capable of opposing Germany's hegemony and Germany would have secured its "natural" Lebensraum, would he finally make his decisions known. And he would do so without pretense or compromise, taking into account only Germany's interests and thus imposing them on both the defeated and the Allies. On the one hand, there was the attempt to justify German hegemonic policy and, on the other, the attempt to distinguish the Italian position from the German one. See, for example, L. Chersi, Considerazioni geopolitiche sul nuovo ordine internazionale (Geopolitical considerations on the new international order), ibid., April 1941, pp. 206 ff., where we read: "From an economic point of view, living space should mean a territory that is sufficiently large and varied in its economic structure to allow the human communities living in it enormous mass production according to the modern division of labor and, therefore, sufficient exchange of capital and products; in other words: an autarkic economy independent of the economic policy of the great world capitalisms that have so far been the

masters of raw materials. From a political point of view, living space should represent a territory sufficiently supplied with raw materials and foodstuffs so as to prevent the peoples inhabiting it from becoming subject to the will of any great hegemonic power. Politically, thisenvironment would bring together various states, oriented towards each other also for reasons of racial demobiology, in full confidence of good neighborliness and in clear awareness of their mutual needs. Each individual member state would have the assurance that none of the participants would pursue a policy of hostility against any other state in the same space and, in particular, would not associate with foreign powers or become their docile instrument. The existence of individual states, however, is not endangered by the living spaces surrounding them, while the organization of these spaces will bemore flexible and dynamic than that of the federal state, as contemplated by international law, whose constituent elements of people and territory are at the same time constituent elements of other states living within and under the authority of the federal state. Also worth noting is the review by the Committee for Study and Action for the New Order 'L'Ordine Nuovo', which was published from 1941 to 1943. Among other things, it published summaries of the reports given by Professors Biagio Pace (Mediterranean Unity) and Felice Vinci (The Essential Character of So-called Economic Spaces) at the Heidelberg conference organized in January 1943 by the Institute for the Economy of Large Spaces, which was also attendedby Aldo Fiaccadori and Jacopo Mazzei. See ibid., nos. 26 (January 1, 1943, pp. 3 ff.) 27-28 (January 16-February 1, February 1943, pp. 5 ff.) and 29-31 (February 16-March 15, 1943, pp. io ff.). For initial information on the Nazi programs and policies of the "New Order," see J. Freymond, Le IIIe Reich et la réorganisation économique de l'Europe 1940-1942, cit. and, for aspects directly concerningItaly, see especially pp. 190 ff. See P. Pastorelli, L'esaurimento dell'iniziativa dell', pp. 153 ff. Returning to Italy from a trip to Berlin between November 23 and 29, 1941, R. Suster drafted a report on the situation. It is not necessary here to delve into an examination of the extremely serious negative consequences that Hitler's line of conduct probably had for Germany in the war in the East. Even without entering into the highly controversialquestion of the meeting which, according to Liddell Hart, von Ribbentrop and Molotov had in the spring of 1943 in Kirovograd to examine the possibility of reaching a peace agreement, which ended in failure due to Hitler's intransigence in wanting the future border between the two countries to run along the Dnieper (while the Soviet side wanted to return to the old one), it is a fact that, with his idea of securing for Germany, in addition to the possession of the Germanic countries, he also addressed en passant the problem of the 'New Order'. In this regard, Suster wrote: 'The military spirit, already traditionally strong in all Germanic activities, is penetrating so deeply even into the most peaceful administrations, and the cult of 'force' is gradually replacing all other feelings and beliefs. And this perhaps one of the psychological aspects of the current war that most deserves to be followed, given the threats and dangers it may represent tomorrow. By virtue of this, in fact, all problems, but above all those concerning external expansion, relations, and collaboration with other peoples, are addressed and approached solely in terms of the "quotient" of relative and absolute power that their solution and settlement may represent in the framework of the German conceptionGermanic vision. Thus, on the 'new European order' to be achieved once victory

has been won, one has the impression that even the executive bodies with the greatest responsibilities have so far only very vague and fluctuating ideas, and that, while on the one hand such a lack of fixed points of reference is deplored in an abstract way, on the other hand it is considered convenient and astute not to prejudice the future in any way with statements, detailed plans, and contingent agreements, so as to keep all peoples, friends and enemies alike, convinced that everything will depend on and be resolved according to the generosity and good graces of the military victor. This inevitably provokes, in some circles, bitter observations about the state of permanent 'fear' which, in this way, a German victory continues and will continue to instill in most European capitals. But, in the adaptation of such a political strategy, one can recognize those military tactical concepts that are also applied in the construction of peace. This lack, or rather, this ostentatious avarice of concrete indications of the practical intentions of German policy for the postwar period arouses, on the other hand, in the subconscioussubconscious of the German masses the conviction that the Führer does not want to foreclose on the basis of the vast spoils of territorial and military assets that Germany now holds. The main object of exchange for such a compromise should, in everyone's opinion, be the more or less disguised annexation of the entire Russian plain up to the Urals, with relative Germanic colonization, economic and political colonization of all those boundless lands, compensated for the opposing side by the renunciation of inflicting mortal wounds on the British Empire. The inclusion of all of European Russia in the Germanic and European industrial, commercial, cultural, and political cycle is, in fact, beginning to be considered, from all points of view, as a result that, on its own, may be sufficient to justify the war and rewardthe victory. At the same time, from the point of view of 'German power' and the general situation on the European continent, it is believed that such a solution would lead to the creation of a vast and complete German empire that would ensureEurope to maintain its hegemonic function in the world system. The possible renunciation of the destruction of the British Empire, or at least a reasonable adaptation to its survival as the framework of the modern world organization, does not mean, however, a return to the Führer's original concepts, according to which the British colonial empire represented and represents a common heritage of all white peoples, and particularly those of Europe: a heritage that it would have been risky to undermine, without exposing all the countries of the old continent to a fatal collapse of prestige among the peoples of other continents and without causing, in the economic field, very serious phenomena of dispersion, which could compromise the progress and future of mankind' (in the Suster Archive). See B. H. Liddell Hart, Military History of the Second World War, op. cit., p. 685. With the occupation of Poland and the former Austrian Galicia, a free hand and control of Russia as far as the Urals and the Caucasus, and his absolute refusal to consider the Russian problem in any terms other than racial and those of direct Germanic 'living space', the Führer prejudiced from the outset the possibility (far from hypothetical in the early months of the war, as the situation changed radically when the brutality of German occupation policy became fully apparent and the hopes of the early months, more or less latent in the Russians, turned into a determined will to fight and resist, giving rise to a national patriotism that was in no way inferior to that which had led to Napoleon's defeat) of turning the situation to his advantage with appropriatepolitical initiatives (which his

most astute collaborators, starting with Goebbels, also suggested to him) the discontent and opposition to the Stalinist regime present at that time in Soviet society among the peasants who had not resigned themselves to the collectivization of the land, among the "minor" nationalities' nationalities who aspired to independence, and even in some military sectors who attributed the defeats suffered by the Red Army to the damage caused by Stalin's purges, which a few years earlier had deprived the USSR of its military elite, to his lack of foresight, and to his claim to dictate the broad strategic lines of the fight against the Germans. What we want to make clear here is that, with the start of the campaign in Russia and, even earlier, when it was being prepared, the problems of the future European order, including those connected with the creation of a sort of European unification, which had also interested him when, in the second half of 1940, he had considered the possibility of creating a 'continental bloc' in order to bring England to its knees, disappeared completely fromHitler's horizon. While awaiting victory in the east, what really mattered to him was, on the one hand—as we have already said—to retain maximum freedom and therefore not to make any commitments whatsoever and, on the other hand—especially as the struggle became tougher, victory over the USSR was projected over an increasingly long period of time and the human and economic costs necessary to pursue it grew disproportionately—to extract from the occupied territories in the East and West and, where possible, even from the Allies, everything that could be used to support Germany's war effort and alleviate the living conditions of the German people. And this, using all means, even the most brutal and inhuman, without giving the slightest thought to the hostility that Germany was thus attracting everywhere and at all levels, the concerns it aroused in the Allied governments and those of the occupied countries, the disappointment, criticism, and increasingly radical rethinking it provoked in circles, especially French ones, which, although not pro-Nazi, had initially given credence (not infrequently thanks to their aversion to England and their anti-communism) to the possibility of creating a 'new European order' that would revive the function and hegemony of the old continent in the world, and who had often sacrificed their previous distrust or even aversion to Germany to this idea. It is only in this context that we can understand the positions taken on the issue of the ' New Order'—we use this definition in its broadest historical sense, not limited to the territorial, political-economic, and ideological content given to it at the time, but extended to a whole other series of aspects, such as the German occupation policy, economic exploitation, deportation, and the extermination of the Jews, first by Ciano and then by Bastianini and Mussolini himself. As far as Ciano is concerned, it can be said that after the mainly formal results obtained in October 1940 by Minister Riccardi with his trip to Germany throughout 1941-42, he practically refrained from raising the issue with the Germans. In his realism-cynicism, the Foreign Minister felt that the problem was of little current relevance and, at the same time, did not want to complicate the already difficult relations with Berlin by raising issues that he knew it did not want to deal with. Faced with the dual facts ofGerman hegemony over Europe and Italy's inability to counter it, rather than aggravating the dispute with Berlin with a new topic of controversy,Italy, in his words, "sit at the right hand of the host" and wait for events to unfold, whatever they might be. However, not everyone agreed with this approach. Among his critics, at the forefront were various representatives of the economic

world or those linked to it. For them, Italy had entered the war to obtain a "fair" distribution of essential raw materials (both directly and as a partner in a "community of European interests"), so they wanted a more incisive attitude that did not postpone everything until victory, leaving the Germans free to make any decision, and that sought to lay the foundations for the future "community of interests" right away, in order to preempt the Germans and enhance Italy's role among other European countries. There was no shortage of doubts even within the Foreign Ministry itself. And these doubts grew after Roosevelt and Churchill had summarized, in August 1941, in what would become commonly known as the "Atlantic Charter," the common principles of their policy and of the new world order that would emerge after "the final destruction of Nazi tyranny." The result of a compromise between the two leaders, one of whom was not yet directly involved in the conflict, the document, as a declaration of principles, certainly did not add much to what had already been stated in other declarations and, compared, for example, to the formula of the "four freedoms," was even less demanding and not without a certain amount of propagandistic demagoguery. Nevertheless, given the Axis' silence on the principles and organization of the "New Order," the "Atlantic Charter" was a statement whose effects could not be countered by simply defining it, as Goebbels did, as a "devious propaganda campaign" destined to dissolve like a was a stance whose effects could not be countered by simply defining it, as Goebbels did, as a 'devious propaganda campaign' destined to dissolve like a soap bubble and a 'Jewish-Bolshevik operation'. This was all the more so because, while the 'New Order' remained a formula without content, the more time passed, the less doubt there was about German policy what the fate of Europe would be if Germany won. Hence, even at Palazzo Chigi, there was growing perplexity and concern about the general political consequences and, above all, about the future of Italy and, therefore, about Ciano's passivity. Pietromarchi's diary contains a note that is very transparent in this regard: Our press reports very little about German plans for European organization. The German leadership itself reveals very little about its intentions, even though it has clear ideas on the matter. But the signs and hints that appear here and there in the theoretical studies of specialized journals and, above all, the attitudes of superiority and command that political bodies, military circles, and even representatives of large economic complexes are already assuming, leave all those in Italy who have relations, with the Germanic world for professional or business reasons. It is clear that Berlin wants to bring economic, political, and even cultural and social unity to the European continent. To what extent this unification will undermine national autonomy, subordinate the interests of individual states to those of Germany, or, in other words, seek to Germanize Europe, no one, perhaps not even the Germans themselves, can say, not least because these are progressive movements which, once set in motion, are impossible to stop. While Germany's desire for unification is evident, so too is the desire of all European peoples, large and small, not to allow themselves to be Germanized. However, from 1941 onwards, it was Alfieri who tried hardest to persuade Ciano and Mussolini to convince the Germans of the need to make the "New Order" something more than a propaganda slogan that no longer satisfied even Germany's most willing collaborators and that Germany's policy was making less and less credible. From his observatory in Berlin, Alfieri was able to assess the situation better than others in terms

that were not those of immediate Italian convenience. It was probably thanks to his insistence that Mussolini, in the third decade of 1941, who, from his Berlin observatory, was better able than others to assess the situation in terms other than those of Italy's immediate convenience. It was probably thanks to his insistence that Mussolini, when he visited the Russian front in the third week of August 1941, tried to raise the issue with Hitler. However, Hitler dismissed Vavance and, as Mussolini did not insist, it was Anfuso who tried to discuss it by submittingvon Ribbentrop a brief statement to be included in the official communiqué to be issued jointly at the end of the meeting. But even Anfuso failed to achieve anything in practice: after lengthy discussions and countless rewrites, the statement, reduced to a few generalities, only saw the light of day in the official Italian communiqué issued after Mussolini's return to Italy. Various clues suggest that Mussolini, knowing Hitler's psychology and ideas on the matter and being aware that he had no leverage to force his hand, must have made his attempt without much conviction, more to be able to tell those who were pressing him that he had taken action in order to achieve something. This explains why, after his failure, while not hiding his irritation, he took a position similar to that of his son-in-law. Thus, the question of the 'New Order' was not among those he gave Ciano the task of dealing with in particular when he went to see Hitler in October; and even on his son-in-law's subsequent trip to Germany the following month, theonly issue that could be linked to it in any way that he told him to address was that (which Ciano discussed mainly with Göring, who proved to be completely deaf to the issue) of the extremely serious food situation in Greece. This was a problem that worried him more and more because of the economic burden it placed on Italy and, above all, because, as he would write to Hitler on July 22 of the following year to ask him to "lighten the occupation costs," as he, for his part, was willing to do, in order to give the Greek economy some breathing space, he feared that hunger could be "a bad advisor" and cause difficulties for the Axis in a region that "has remained calm so far." Nor did things turn out differently at the Salzburg conference on April 29-30, 1942. Hitler and von Ribbentrop were careful not to broach the subject, and neither Mussolini nor Ciano did anything to break their silence, contenting themselves with a vague assurance that the future settlement of Europe would be based on the principle of nationality, "but only Germany andItaly will have a position of prime importance." This was despite the fact that Alfieri had promptly sent Ciano a note in which, after a brief examination of the German political and military situation in light of Hitler's speech to the Reichstag three days earlier and the significance to be attributed to his assumption of full extra-legal powers, he came to this conclusion: The offensive on the Eastern Front will, according to the prevailing opinion, be highly successful, but it will not decisive unless it is supplemented by a parallel offensive towards Egypt and unless the favorable military situation is immediately exploited on the political level. n In view of the methodical, characteristic slowness of German plans to mature, it seems appropriate to provoke their preparation now, so as to give European public opinion, anxious to know what the final fate of the different states of Europe will be, the necessary details on the organization of thenew continental order. The imminent examination of the new French situation may provide a suitable opportunity for this. Italy's role in this field is fundamental. The occupied, neutral, and allied countries, and a large part of Germany itself, look anxiously to Italy as a balancing

factor and to the Duce as the only man capable of speaking authoritatively and openly and of influencing Hitler, as evidenced by facts and reliable indications. Although there were those at Palazzo Chigi, even among Ciano's close associates, who were increasingly indignant and concerned about the Germans' behavior, and despite the failure of his move at the Salzburg meeting, Alfieri repeatedly drew Ciano's attention to the importance of the issue, emphasizing not only and not so much the future (on what could be understood of Hitler's increasingly extremist and 'missionary' hegemonic intentions for the post-victory period) as on the growing hatred and damage, both in terms of relations with the Allies and neutrals and in terms of the attitude of the populations subject to the Axis, of German occupation policy. Throughout the time Ciano remained at Palazzo Chigi, in relations between Rome and Berlin, Hitler was never seriously mentioned. Alfieri dealt with the issue in general terms and without taking an explicit position. The long paragraph ("Occupied countries and political future") devoted to it, although it read like a mere report, was indicative of what he wanted Ciano to understand: "For the first time since I have been discussing this subject, I have noticed a certain interest in the situation in the occupied territories and their future among those closest to Ribbentrop. Not so much with regard to maintainingorder, but rather, when I deliberately expressed my concern that the material and moral unrest in those territories could turn into popular unrest, I was answered with the usual formula that 'with the control of modern means of warfare at our disposal, the emergence of any serious organized attempt at revolt, and even more so its success, can be ruled out'. At the same time, it was agreed that these are situations that cannot and should not be dragged on indefinitely. From a material point of view, the German government has therefore already taken steps to ensure a satisfactory minimum standard of living for the occupied territories for the coming winter. As for the future, and in particular the post-war period, "it is clear, I have been told, that countries such as France, Belgium, and the Netherlands must be put in a position not only to live, but also to earn a living. I also wonder," my interlocutor added, "to what extent it is in our interest to interfere in the internal affairs of the various European countries, such as their respective forms of government. A totalitarian regime like ours would probably be unsustainable in France. And why should it not be possible to coexist in the new European order, within a specific hierarchical framework, of disparate forms of government, provided that they are in line with the mentality of the various peoples? I must say that although this nascent aspiration, still almost inarticulate and perhaps unconscious, towards some future form of international tolerance and collaboration does not seem to correspond to or even find an echo in the thinking of the Foreign Minister for the time being, it corresponds to a general attitude that I find interesting to follow. Megerle, who who has also joined Ribbentrop's permanent staff, and with whom I have had lengthy discussions, brought up the subject on his own initiative, showing visible interest in knowing what the Fascist government thought about it and asking me insistently whether Rome did not consider that the time had come to take some initiative in this regard. But even more interesting, it seems to me, is to note how this attitude stems from a deeper evolution of thought. Namely, the polarization of general interest towards new horizons: to the east, towards the vast territories that are opening up to Germanic expansion. Perhaps the influence of physical permanence in the place? Perhaps

the very speed of military developments and the pressing of urgent political and administrative problems that arise as the tide of German occupation spreads? Certainly that in the very accusations levelled against Soviet misgovernment, in the commiseration of the population, in the desire to paint the current situation in Russia in the darkest colors, there is something more than just polemical argumentation. And like a true spirit of mission that pervades everyone, there is a desire to demonstrate one's superior organizational skills, to fulfill a historical destiny. It is the old banner, already waved in its time by Bismarck and Hitler, of the "Drang nach dem Osten," which today finds greater justification in a practical concept: the idea of the need to exploit the enormous riches that Russia promises and which will have to compensate for the damage that the loss of territories and markets in the Far East and perhaps even India itself, which we have resigned ourselves to seeing definitively pass into the Lebensraum of Japan's unchallenged military and economic power, represents for the whole of Europe and indirectly also for Germany. In short, Russia must be not only the source of raw materials, but also the market for Germany's overflowing industrial production, the "Middle West of the new Europe', but also the confirmation of the 'Führungs' capacity of National Socialist Germany and the justification of the current war before humanity'. In mid-October, in a military stalemate for both Germany and Italy, and after Ciano (at Mussolini's request) had asked him at the end of August for news on German intentions regarding the 'New Order' (cf. G. Ciano, Diario cit., p. 646), Alfieri was much more explicit. Referring directly to his note of April 29 and to some recent statements by leading members of the German government, in particular an article by Goebbels published on October 4 in Das Reich (in which he stated that the lesser peoples of Europe had to be convinced of the advisability of renouncing part or all of their current statehood in favor of a stronger state stronger state capable of leading them, and that this right to lead belonged only to those who had obtained it through military victory), he addressed practically all the main points of the "New Order" question, both those concerning the future and those concerning the present: 'The problem of the new Europe has two aspects: that of the future political and economic organization of the continent, a problem that can very well be left aside for the moment; and that of the fate that will be reserved in this new European organization for the individual states that exist today, and in particular for the smaller ones, which have often secured their existence, largely justified by the ethnic and historical foundations of their peoples, at the cost of bloody struggles. The latter problem is particularly relevant because its solution, or at least the establishment of clear principles to precede it, would allow Germany to achieve a practical result with immediate benefits. While most of the leaders of these smaller European states may never have heard of a phrase by Bismarck that is particularly relevant at the present time: " I have always found the word 'Europe' on the lips of those politicians who ask other powers for something they dare not demand in the name of the 'New Order', nor, even less so, in its most current aspects, fraught with negative moral, political, and military consequences. The only exception was the situation in Greece, and this was because Mussolini wanted it that way, since Ciano, after Hitler's flat refusal to consider what the 'Duce' had written to him in his letter of July 22, would have preferred not to return to the issue1. However, it is certain that these leaders, with the political line they impose on their governments, demonstrate that

they have intuited the hidden meaning of certain German statements regarding the new Europe. They hear talk of this new Europe from Berlin at every turn, but as soon as they ask the Germans for any clarification, they are told that it is too early for that, while they often hear barely veiled allusions to the need for small powers to be deprived to a greater or lesser extent of their current political and, above all, economic autonomy. Such talk naturally arouses suspicion, generates hesitation, and justifies concern. Their attention then turns with keen interest to what is happening in the occupied countries. There, the German government sometimes claims to want to lay the foundations for the future settlement. Leaving aside particular situations such as in Poland or the Soviet territorieswhere thethe Reich's actions have clearly annexationist aims, we can observe the situation in Greece, Serbia, France, Belgium, Holland, and Norway. We then realize that, stripped of attitudes of greater or lesser severity, greater or lesser benevolence, which may be suggested by temporary political contingencies, the precise line of conduct followed by the Reich towards these countries appears to be the following: to aim at exploiting every economic resource of the country for the immediate benefit of the German economy, without any concern for creating anything stable and lasting in the exploited country. Goering's words about the position of the occupied territories in relation to the Reich are unequivocal in this sense. The experience of the occupied territories, a testing ground for the future of Europe, and the silence in response to requests for clarification about their future, does not fail to arouse among the representatives of the smaller states to feel the concern about German policy that I mentioned earlier. This concern is reflected in the attitude of these states (among which Turkey and Spain must also be included for the purposes of this argument) in a marked lack of confidence regarding political relations with the Reich. These states no longer believe in lasting agreements and understandings with Germany based on a balance of mutual interests.. The Auswärtiges Amt is perfectly aware of and understands this state of mind. The only thing that keeps certain smaller states united with Germany, preventing them from switching to the opposing camp, is fear of German military power. This is particularly noticeable when observing the reactions of these countries to theprogress of the war campaigns. When the Reich's arms are victorious, the governments of the countries in question show greater acquiescence to Berlin's wishes and greater readiness to submit to demands that are often presented in the form of impositions. As soon as the fate of the arms appears less certain and German success less complete, the desire for independent policy becomes more apparent. The recent fluctuations in the campaign on the Eastern Front have been matched by corresponding shifts in the orientation of Spain, Turkey, and Romania. From the above, I believe I can arrive at a conclusion that, summarizing the dominant aspect of political relations between Germany and the other European states, is undoubtedly of considerable importance at the present time. Apart fromItaly and Japan, with whom it has a very special relationship, Germany has no friendly powers around it in the sense that they sincerely wish for its victory and unreservedly seek to collaborate with it. The Reich's foreign policy has simply succeeded, on the strength of its military victories and its formidable economic penetration, in polarizing around itself a series of states that are more or less controlled and more or less subject to it, to which it offers increasingly limited compensation and from which it is increasingly preparing to demand more and more as the

conflict drags on and becomes more burdensome. One may therefore wonder what theattitude of these minor powers when Germany calls on them in a moment of real difficulty." See G. Ciano, Diary, p. 646 (August 30, 1942), as well as p. 642 (August 8), which clearly shows that Alfieri's report two days earlier had no effect on Ciano ("he knew nothing concrete and therefore talks a lot"), except to irritate him and make him think about the advisability of "keeping his successor ready." After he had tried in vain in August 1941, without much effort, to talk to Hitler about the "New Order', Mussolini, as we have said, had taken a position similar to that of his son-in-law. Similar, but not identical. For in his realism-cynicism, Ciano tended to ignore the issue, at least as a political issue (except to make it the subject of anti-German jokes in Roman salons), while Mussolini, although he did not know how or was afraid to address it with the Germans, waswas well aware of it, was concerned about it, followed its developments, listened with interest to those who, like Alberto Pirelli, spoke to him about it, to the point of making it one of the main reasons for his irritation and criticism of the Germans. Typical in this regard is a statement of his (but many others could be cited) preserved in Ciano's diary under the date of October 8, 1942 I am calm about thethe military progress of the war... But if we lose the war, it will be due to the political brutality of the Germans, who did not want to use common sense and moderation and who have made all of Europe as fiery and treacherous as a volcano. And, as the situation became increasingly serious, he also tried, in some more serious and worrying cases that directly affected Italy, to navigate between the opposing and irreconcilable demands of not openly clash with the Germans, not to make the same mistakes as them, to confront the spread of resistance in the Italian occupation zones, and to give Italy and its politics a different, more humane image. This was especially true when the Germans were pressuring Italy to conform and collaborate with their politics, their "philosophy," and their way of implementing it. His behavior towards the deportation and extermination of the Jews, which Hitler had ordered a few months after theattack on the USSR. According to the available documentation, there is no evidence that the Germans ever formally informed Rome of their plans for the 'final solution', particularly before July 25, 1943. It is significant that in a lengthy secret report dated February 3, 1943, sent to Ciano by Alfieri, the latter, discussing the 'Jewish problem in Germany' since November 1938 (i.e., sincethe assassination of von Rath) and how it had been addressed and "resolved," he spoke at length about the deportations from Germany and the occupied territories, the establishment of ghettos in Nisko, Lublin, and Warsaw, the inhumane living conditions in them, and the " mass executions," but he did so only on the basis of information gathered by himself and his collaborators, or public statements, such as that made by Rosenberg at the Labor Front congress at the end of the previous year, according to which the total extermination of the Jews was to be considered a "humanitarian action," "because it would heal the European peoples." Even before this report, however, Rome had afairly precise idea of the policy of extermination of the Jews implemented by the Germans, even if it did not know all the details and the monstrous scale of it. Embassies, legations, military commands, and individuals who had come into contact with the reality of the German occupation since 1941 had in fact informed Palazzo Chigi and Mussolini himself. To give an example, the secretary of the PNF, Aldo Vidussoni, who in the last ten days of September 1942 had led a

party delegation on a visit to the Russian front and the troops of the Fifth Army, wrote in his report to the Duce upon his return: "Absolute rigor is shown towards the Jews, who are severely treated and subjected to restrictions of all kinds, even though there are some who work. I have been told by Italians living in those territories and sometimes even by Germans in a confiding mood, that shootings are the order of the day, even for large groups of individuals of all ages and sexes. In Minsk, at the Opera House, we saw the belongings of thousands and thousands of murdered Jews piled up, which it seems will be distributed to the population. They exploit, they say, only those who can work, and only until they are physically exhausted. What struck the Italians most was the manner of killing, to which, moreover, the victims seem resigned. Entire towns and villages have seen their populations reduced by up to a third or a half, especially due to the elimination of the Jews. And, moreover, on November 6, 1942, Alberto Pirelli, who had returned from a trip to Paris, Brussels, and Berlin, submitted a report to him in which he focused essentially on the "deplorable nature of Germany's policy towards the occupied countries and the Allies," which contrasted with the logic of a war of attrition and made it impossible to achieve "a lasting European settlement for the post-war period" and aroused "feelings of hatred and rebellion among all the populations of the occupied countries." When Pirelli came to talk to him about the "inhuman excesses against the Jews" and the "forced mass migrations" of Jews carried out by the Germans, Mussolini interrupted him with a comment that shows he was already aware of their fate: "They are making them emigrate... to the other world."1 Germans, had not informed Rome of the "final solution," but since 1941 they had been pressing Italy to adopt a less "lax" line of conduct, more in line with the "racial policy" towards Jews, and certainly not to protect them. From the initial disagreements in the first half of 1941, caused by the "lack of sensitivity" shown by the by not allowing their Jewish citizens to return from Germany (the issue dragged on until early 1943 when Berlin issued an ultimatum of deportation or repatriation) and Rome's firm requests to the Germans to release Italian Jews arrested by them in France or elsewhere, provided that there was nothing "unfavorable" about them "apart from the question of race." This gradually led to friction, protests, and increasingly serious pressure, mainly concerning the behavior of various commands, including armies, and Italian occupation troops in France (between the end of 1942 and July 1943, in the Italian occupation zone, there was a real clash between the Vichy and Italian authorities, who, in order to prevent the arrest and handover to the Germans of Jews who had taken refuge there, took it upon themselves to arrest and intern Jews "regardless of their nationality" throughout the zone), in Yugoslavia and Greece. By the summer of 1942, the pressure had become more insistent and intense. On August 17, the embassy in Rome took steps towards joint action against the Jewish refugees in the Italian-occupied zone in Yugoslavia (about three thousand), in practice for their handover. At this point, unwilling and unable to refuse, but realizing the seriousness of the request and pressured from many quarters to preserve the honor of the Italian army from such a disgrace, Mussolini resorted to a bureaucratic subterfuge, which allowed him, on the one hand, not to refuse the Germans and, on the other, to buy time and see how the situation developed. It was certainly a morally squalid subterfuge, but one that, until the armistice of September 8, would save the lives of thousands of Jews. On August 24, Ambassador von

Mackensen was formally informed that the "Duce" had given his "approval." In bureaucratic practice, giving " approval' without accompanying it with any instructions was equivalent to authorizing the request to be taken into consideration by those who were supposed to carry it out, namely the military authorities, first at the central level and then locally. Thus, after consulting with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Supreme Command began to study the matter, instructing the command of the First Army for the time being only to proceed with a census of Jews and ascertain their nationality. Meanwhile, Palazzo Chigi had its legal advisors prepare the case studies on the basis of which the "pertinence" of the Jews themselves to the territories annexed to Italy. And since those who were recognized as 'relevant' would not be included in the list of those to be handed over, the criteria were broadened as much as possible to include not only those born in the annexed areas, but also those who had been residing there for a long time, who had relatives up to the third degree or real estate there, and who had particular meritstowards Italy and the occupying troops. The Germans soon realized that this was nothing more than a ploy to postpone everything indefinitely and not proceed with the handover, so much so that on October 3 and 21, the embassy in Rome took steps to urge compliance with the Italian commitment of August 24. However, the only result they achieved was that the Italian military authorities , in order to prevent the Germans from using the argument (spurious, but difficult to ignore) that the Jews were spying for the enemy, decided to concentrate them in special camps (from which, in March 1943, to prevent any possible changes in the Italian and German occupation zones, they would be transferred to the island of Arbe, which had been annexed to Italy). Equally unsuccessful was the proposal put forward by the Germans on December 9 to transfer by sea to Trieste and from there to Germany the Jews who had been gathered in concentration camps by the Italians: Rome rejected this proposal on the grounds that there were no ships available for transport. At this point, Berlin's irritation reached its peak: Italy's double-dealing was demonstrated by the fact that the same delaying and obstructionist attitude adopted in Yugoslavia could be found everywhere, in France, Tunisia, and Greece. So when von Ribbentrop came to Rome at the end of February 1943 to deliver Hitler's letter of the 16th to Mussolini and resolve the Mihajlovic issue, he also addressed the Jewish question. Mussolini, as we have said, was now focusing entirely on the prospect of resolving the conflict in the East. Every other issue was secondary to him or to be considered only in relation to it. If digging in his heels on the Mihajlovic issue could make sense in this perspective, i.e., as a way of making Berlin understand that Italy did not want to give up making its case heard and, above all, protecting its interests, on everything concerning the Jewish question, digging in his heels was impossible: it would have been tantamount to irreparably falling out with Hitler, who was absolutely intransigent on this matter (and a passage in the letter brought by von Ribbentrop confirmed this abundantly), there would be no chance of convincing him and almost certainly exposing oneself to his wrath and his fanatical desire to 'bring to justice' all 'traitors' and 'philo-Semites'. Nor should it be underestimated that if Mussolini had shared the military's line of conduct until then, it was not only because of the humanity that lurked deep in his soul, but above all for two exquisitely political, which, at the point where things had reached, were losing importance in his eyes and, in any case, were certainly not enough to induce him to challenge Hitler. The

first was his awareness that passive alignment with Nazi positions on the violent persecution of Jews would provoke strong negative reactions among Italians, make the regime and the war even more unpopular, and cause a further decline in his personal prestige. As for the second, by differentiating Italy's anti-Jewish policy and racism, he intended to help make Italy a reference point for all those in Europe who feared German hegemony (governments, peoples, minority ethnic groups, etc.). As long as the war had been favorable to the Axis, he had pinned his hopes on this in order to be able to counteract Germany's power to some extent in the postwar period. Bearing all this in mind, it is understandable why, in the face of von Ribbentrop's insistence, Mussolini, while standing firm on the Mihajlovic issue, did not dig his heels in on that of the Jews of Yugoslavia. He was in Rome for three days and bored me in every way, Minister Ribbentrop would say a few days later to Gen. Robotti, that he wants the Yugoslav Jews handed over at all costs. I prevaricated, but since he refused to leave, in order to get him out of my face, I had to agree. The Jews must be brought to Trieste and handed over to the Germans. But then, after von Ribbentrop left, faced with the complaints and objections of Bastianini (the 'honorary Jew' as the Germans had called him since he was in Dalmatia), Ambrosio, Robotti, and others, he backtracked, trying to repeat the game of six months earlier. As he always said to General Robotti, I had to promise to hand them over, but you can make up all the excuses you want so as not to hand over a single Jew. Say that we have absolutely no means of transport to take them to Trieste by sea, since it is not possible to do so by land. The same thing happened a month later, when von Mackensen raised the issue of the Jews in the occupation zone in France with him, openly accusing the Italian military authorities of obstructionism. At first, he told him that he would give orders so that they would no longer oppose the round-up that the Vichy police carried out on behalf of the Germans; then, faced with Bastianini's protests, who revealed that he had just received news that the Jews were being 'gassed by the Germans, without distinction between old people, women and children', he let him give von Mackensen the 'authentic interpretation' of what he had previously told him: the army would no longer deal with the Jews, they would be dealt with by the Italian police, who would arrange for their internment. The French police, Bastianini explained to the ambassador, should not be involved in the rounding up of Jews because they were in collusion with them, warning them a few hours and helps them escape in exchange for payment. Elle se fait graisser la patte... understand? We will send them to concentration camps and keep an eye on them. Besides, even on the issue of the "New Order" (unless it involved aspects that affected the military in the strict sense), Mussolini had now lost much of his initial interest. At this point, it had become secondary to him and could only cloud relations with Berlin. The fact that at this very time, and especially in April 1943, Bastianini obtained his authorization to urge the Germans to recognize the opportunity, indeed the necessity, for the Axis to present its own "political line of the war" should not be misleading. In our opinion, what led Mussolini to accept Bastianini's point of view was not so much the undersecretary's powers of persuasion, for it is difficult to imagine that at that moment the "Duce" could really believe that it was sufficient to counter the "Atlantic Charter" with a declaration, however solemn, on the Axis's future intentions to set a new course to the war, but rather the accumulation of a series of moods and considerations that had little or

nothing to do with thethe "New Order." We will discuss at length in a future chapter the state of mind with which Mussolini lived the months from the Allied landing in French North Africa to July 25. Here, it suffices to say that, while the image credited by many contemporaries and adopted by historiography of a Mussolini so prostrate as to be incapable of genuine reactions and autonomous decisions, it is undoubtedly true that during these months he wavered more than once between different states of mind, during which he cherished projects and hopes that were not only unachievable but also contradictory. In this psychological condition, it is far from improbable that Bastianini's favor was influenced by his resentment towards the Germans (towards whom, as has long been said, he had long reproached for arousing only mistrust, hostility, and hatred) and toward Ciano for his passivity in the face of the Germans and their obstinacy in refusing even to discuss the structure to be given to Europe. In our opinion, however, at least three other, more strictly political reasons must be added to these psychological ones. Having decided to "return to politics," Bastianini's proposal, on the one hand, lent itself well to making the Germans understand that Italy wanted to make its opinion heard on all political issues that directly and indirectly affected the overall strategy of the war and that, as such, involved its own future as much as that of Germany. On the other hand, it could contribute to strengthening political collaboration with the Japanese, who, as we shall see shortly, were also increasingly criticaltowards the Germans, and, on yet another hand, it could serve to restore Italy's role as a guide and leader for those countries, primarily Hungary and Romania, which, like Italy, were increasingly concerned about the course of the war but were not in a position to make their case in Berlin. Finally, it should be added that Mussolini was probably aware that there were those in Germany who did not share Hitler's obstinacy in refusing to make any commitment regarding the future territorial and political organization ofEurope and viewed with deep concern the vacuum that this, combined with the brutality of German occupation policy, was creating around Germany. Palazzo Chigi had been informed of these German concerns on several occasions, but Ciano had always limited himself to taking note of them, even though he knew that some of his own collaborators criticized his passivity and believed that Italy, especially after the publication of the Atlantic Charter,Atlantic Charter', should strive to counter it with a document summarizing the Axis's intentions for the future of Europe, which could be used by Germany's allies to try to curb, to some extent, its brutal and suicidal policy of exploitation of the continent; and, again, even though he knew that this idea was shared and had even been proposed by those Germans who viewed Hitler's obstinacy negativelyaction of Hitler and who probably hoped that Italy would be the one to promote it. It is significant in this regard that the first reference to a 'Charter of Europe' that we have been able to find is in a report sent to Ciano by the ambassador in Ankara, De Peppo, on March 1, 1942. March 1942. In it, referring to a "confidential and personal" conversation he had had with von Papen two days earlier, Ambassador De Peppo explained the point of view of his influential colleague: Von Papen then went on to explain to me his conviction that "the real obstacle to an active policy on our part is the current state of disorganization throughoutEurope." Military victories, in his opinion, whatever their scale, cannot bring peace on their own; regardless of them, we must attempt to give the European continent a political organization, or at least lay the

foundations for a "Charter of Europe" in response to the "Atlantic Charter." No one knows what fate awaits France, Belgium, Holland, Poland, and the areas of greatest interest to Turkey, Greece, Serbia, and the Balkans in general. The convening of a conference to draftthe principles and charter of the new Europe, which would be taken into account to a greater or lesser extent after victory, would have incalculable repercussions on both neutrals and enemies. A couple of weeks after receiving this report from Ankara, Palazzo Chigi had received another that confirmed and validated it in more ways than one, but which did not in the least induce Ciano to consider von Papen's suggestion.Returning to Rome after a year and a half of service at the embassy in Berlin, Mario Luciolli summarized his thoughts on the German situation in a long memo with a clarity and sincerity that Palazzo Chigi had not been accustomed to for some time. Starting from the premise that the German people were now skeptical about the possibility of victory and a truly 'conclusive' peace, and that even German leaders, however great their confidence in victory still was, were also considering the possibility of defeat, Luciolli noted how the Germans were taking 'almost scientific care' to ensure that the Allies and defeated enemies were weakened 'at least as much as Germany' so that 'tomorrow, whatever happens, Germany would always be relatively the strongest." Parallel to this general argument, Luciolli also developed another, less pessimistic one, justified by the fact that, in his opinion, it would take several more years for Germany to be defeated, which would allow it to recover, provided that Europe could finally be organized in a way that was completely different from how the Germans had "disorganized" it with their 'destructive' policy: to defend fiercely what has been achieved so far; to exploit it; to organize the economic and political life of Europe in such a way as to increase its resistance and develop its offensive capabilities; all this seems to constitute a clear and precise goal, a program around which to gather consensus and active support. However, it is precisely in this political work that Germany shows itself to be decidedly and stubbornly inferior to its task. Germany's firm decision to organize Europe hierarchically, like a pyramid with Germany at the top, is well known. But this alone is not enough to characterize the attitude of German leaders towards the problems of European reconstruction. In every country, even those that until yesterday had a more clearly anti-German attitude, there are people and political currents willing to admit that the international order that emerged from the French Revolution and culminated in Versailles has definitively come to an end and that nation states are about to give way to broader political entities, in which the various national elements that will compose them will have a share proportionate to their respective cultural, economic, and demographic potential. The concept of a hierarchical organization of Europe is therefore not repugnant in itself. But what strikes anyone who comes into contact with Germans is their purely mechanical and materialistic conception of the European order. For them, organizingEurope means for them determining how much this or that mine must produce or how many workers must be employed there. They do not realize at all that no economic order can be sustained unless it is based on a political order, and that in order to get the Belgian or Bohemian worker to work, it is not enough to promise him a certain wage, but it is necessary to give him the awareness that he is serving a community of which he is an integral part, which is inherent in him and in which he recognizes himself. In This misunderstanding, this political sterility,

is the danger threatening Germany, much more so than the Russian military threat or Anglo-American propaganda. It is an imminent danger, if not already a reality. For today, the economic forces of Germany and the countries it dominates are disintegrating, not so much because of the depletion of reserves as because of this failure to strengthen the living forces of the peoples. The organization of production sketched outby Germany is a tired organism, in which no lifeblood circulates. Control bodies, austerity measures, and warnings are multiplying in vain. While leaders rush to stimulate activity on one side, it collapses on the other. And even in sectors where statistics show encouraging curves, in reality production is declining in quality if not in quantity, and new problems are arising, to which mechanical and therefore ineffective solutions are being applied, so that the German war machine, admirably prepared in past years thanks precisely to the spiritual impetus given to the German people by National Socialism, is now showing multiple and unmistakable signs of weakness.It is superfluous to dwell on the horrors perpetrated in the occupied Polish and Russian territories (systematic massacres, the killing of women and children, forced prostitution, the use of nuns in brothels, and other misdeeds so appalling that words fail to describe them). In other regions, the power of the SS is more limited and does not allow them to go so far. But everywhere, to a greater or lesser extent, the same tendency to stifle and sterilize the living forces of Europe, rather than channeling and strengthening them, is always evident. It almost seems as if the leaders of today's Germany are not so much seeking to win as to accumulate obstacles on the path to victory. Wherever a force favorable to them awakens, capable of being exploited, they crush it. In the Baltic countries, in Poland, in SlovakiaSlovakia, Serbia, everywhere those who approach Germany with the sincere intention of finding a formula for cooperation immediately suffer disappointment, humiliation, and rejection. All questions addressed to Germany about how it intends to solve the problems of today and tomorrow, of war and peace, remain unanswered: Germany is silent. TheThe note had been submitted by Ciano to Mussolini, who had judged it to be the most "significant and profound" thing he had read on the subject in a long time. He had it read to various leaders and used it to confirm his idea that Italy absolutely had to have fifteen divisions "ready and perfect" by the end of 1943 in the Po Valley by the end of 1943. This idea, apart from its unreality, clearly shows how Mussolini was unable to detach himself from a still traditional image of war, but Ciano's diary suggests that his son-in-law did nothing to try to correct him by pushing him towards a more realistic attitude, nor did he take advantage of the opportunity to advocate at least a review of the policy of the "new order," as many had suggested and as Luciolli had implicitly hinted at in his note. Despite von Papen's suggestion and despite the fact that the idea had been circulating in Rome for months, Luciolli did not take advantage of the opportunity to advocate at least a review of the policy of the "new order," as many had suggested and as Luciolli had implicitly hinted at in his note. Despite von Papen's suggestion and despite the fact that the idea had been circulating in Rome for months, Luciolli did not take advantage of the opportunity to advocate at least a review of the , as had been suggested to him by many and implicitly hinted at by Luciolli in his note. Despite von Papen's suggestion and despite the fact that the idea had been circulating in Rome for months, it was only with the arrival of Bastianini at Palazzo Chigi that serious talks began about a review of the'New

Order' policy and a programmatic document to counter the 'Atlantic Charter'. G. Ciano, Diariocit., pp. 602 ff. (March 24, 1942). As soon as he was informed of von Ribbentrop's imminent visit to Rome, the new undersecretary hastened to submit a note to Mussolini on February 22, which read as follows: Among the essential topics for the conduct of the war that you, Duce, will have to address during the upcoming trip of the German Foreign Minister, I would also like to suggest that you address the very aims of our war, which have so far remained too obscure for European and world public opinion, due to the use of formulas that are either too complex or too abstract. In order not to be overwhelmed by the recent Anglo-Saxon propaganda which, aided by the unfavorable course of military events, has certainly, since the Casablanca Conference , found the way and the bite to influence European public opinion in a way that is clearly unfavorable to us, I believe it is necessary to resort to the same weapons, that is, to set out in a few simple lines the basic concepts that inspire the action of Italy and Germany in view of the new European settlement that is destined to arise from the current conflict. The Wilsonian experience is not enough to create in people's minds the mistrust necessary for the new principles of the Anglo-American gospel. From the point of view of propaganda and accessibility to the masses, the Atlantic Charter is certainly a very clever document, as it outlines in simple terms a program which, with its promise to peoples of independence, respect for their free aspirations, and equal conditions for trade and raw materials in the world, perfectly matches the receptivity of populations who are tired and subjected to the harsh strain of a long war. Certainly, nothing can replace the imposing but sometimes unfortunate efforts of men and means in the vicissitudes of war. However, it is my opinion that nothing should be neglected in order to determine a reaction to the pernicious enemy propaganda and to outline, even on the part of the Axis, the reasons for the war that are too vaguely summarized in the concept of the "New Order." We must not hide the fact that, as things stand at present , i.e., in the face of the enemy's declaration of respect for the territorial integrity of peoples, the principles of nationality, etc., enemy propaganda automatically contrasts territorial arrangements imposed by force on centuries-old national units and others formed and consolidated over the last twenty yearsyears. Battles are won by means, but wars are decided by means and ideas, and we have not always taken this fact into account. The two comments from the foreign press, sent to me by you and enclosed here in copy, illustrate the truth of this statement. Allow me, Duce, to express my opinion that at this crucial moment in our war, it is necessary to clear the horizon with statements that demonstrate to the peoples the true reasons for the war and the future that awaits Europe in the event of an Axis victory. It is necessary that Italy and Germany not be alone in desiring the victory of their arms, but that other peoples see in a common destiny with them the guarantee of a just peace and a prosperous future. I felt it was my duty, Duce, to express these concepts to you in full, and with the passionate sentiment that unifies the Duce and the Fatherland in me, so that you may judge whether they are such as to form the subject of the forthcoming talks with Ribbentrop. The proposal, which, moreover, was in line with what the Japanese military attaché had said to Ambrosio at least ten days earlier, met with Mussolini's approval, who , to use an image from Bastianini in the talks at the end of February, "made Ribbentrop swallow... the bitter pill of an official communiqué in which, for the first time, there was talk

of freedom for all peoples and active collaboration between nations'. However, the declaration had no follow-up, as in the following weeks the Germans were careful not to pursue the matter or take any initiative, despite Bastianini's efforts to give it resonance by entrusting Gayda with the task of taking it up and developing it in a number of articles. Bastianini therefore became convinced that the only thing to do was to break the deadlock and, at the first opportunity, submit to the Germans a plan for a 'Cmap of the continent' and commit Mussolini to supporting it with Hitler, making the Führer understand that 'it is a mistake not to specify what is meant by the "new order" that has been talked about for so long, but in a completely nebulous way'. The opportunity arose at the meeting in Klessheim on April 7-10. On the 6th, before leaving Rome and during the journey, Bastianini had several exchanges of , during which he submitted a long note setting out his point of view1 and emphasized very clearly both the urgency for Italy to find a solution to the conflict and the need, as Mussolini said, for the "swinging back and forth between the two armies, which can lead to no result" to cease. Leveraging these two arguments, and especially the second, he obtained from the "Duce' the approval of the general principles of a solemn Italian-German declaration on the 'New Order' and a commitment to encourage Hitler to approve it as well. According to the text approved by Mussolini, the 'Charter of the Continent' was to revolve around four fundamental declarations: Declaration that in the future settlement of Europe, the principle of nationality and the right andinterest of states to be constituted on a basis of ethnic homogeneity must be respected. Declaration that European states must enjoy complete sovereignty and the right to freely establish their own internal systems. Declaration that European states must establish cooperation among themselves based on an awareness of the moral unity of Europe and on the full and free development of national individuality. Declaration that the Powers of theintend to guide Europe towards a peaceful international life to be achieved through: a fair redistribution of the world's economic resources; genuine cooperation in work, production, trade, and services among all nations. ddi, s. IX, X, pp. 232 ff., see Appendix, Document No. 6. The first draft prepared by Bastianini and and modified by Mussolini himself was conceived as follows: "1) Recognition that states must be founded on the principle of nationality based on ethnic unity. Recognition that states must be assured and guaranteed their complete sovereignty and independence, and that their national individuality must be preserved. Recognition that every state has the right to freely establish its own internal order. RecognitionRecognition of the right of every people to participate directly in the distribution of the world's economic resources. Affirmation of the right of every people to legislation that ensures the principles of social justice on equal terms with other peoples. Affirmation that a peaceful international life can only be achieved through real collaboration in work, production, trade, and services between the various political entities that have secured their independence on the basis of the national principle. Consequently, all peoples must be recognized as having an equal opportunity to live on the basis of equal conditions for all in terms of natural resources and their use, to be implemented in the common interest through full freedom of the sea lanes. The originals of the two documents (the first with Bastianini's handwritten signature and Mussolini's handwritten corrections) are attached to a memorandum entitled "Conversation between the Duce andExc. Bastianini on the train on the afternoon of April 6,

1943, on their way to meet the Führer in Salzburg" (in the Suster Archive, as well as ddi, s. IX, X, pp. 253 ff.), from which we have obtained the information we have reported. L. Vitetti, F. Babuscio-Rizzo, and L. Pietromarchi collaborated on the first draft; Bastianini also discussed it with Contarini and Imperiali. See G. Bastianini, Uomini, cose, fatti cit., p. 92. See also E. Ortona, Il 1943 da Palazzo Chigi cit., p. 1097 (April 6-7, 1943). During the conversations of the following days at Klessheim Castle, Bastianini repeatedly (in particular on April 8) and vigorously raised the issue with von Ribbentrop, insisting on the need to reassure the small states about the Axis's war aims and to clarify that the military occupations in progress were solely due to the need to prevent the British from bringing the war to the continent. However, all his efforts were in vain. His interlocutor initially limited himself to postponing any decision on the "Continental Charter" to what Hitler and Mussolini would decide in their talks. Then, when during these talks the Führer, without even reading the text, rejected the proposal, describing it as a sign of weakness (just as he rejected the proposal to end the war against the USSR, saying he was convinced he would deal it the "final blow" very soon), he in turn described it as premature and too demanding. The only mention of the whole issue in the communiqué issued at the end of the meeting consisted of two meager sentences stating that the common objectives of the two powers were 'the defense of European civilization' and 'the rights of nations to their free development and collaboration' and that the victory of the Tripartite Pact would ensure Europe 'a peace that would guarantee the collaboration of all peoples on the basis of their common interests and lead to an equitable distribution of the world's economic resources." This was an almost insignificant reference, which, moreover, was immediately used by Rome for propaganda purposes to trumpet the "continuity," from 1921 onwards, of the fascist policy of "positive and tangible protection of the aspirations of peoples" and by Bastianini in the political arena to keep alive, despite Hitler's refusal, the discussion with Berlin on the "Continental Charter." He did so on April 21, addressing a letter to von Ribbentrop in which, after emphasizing the "wide and favorable response" that, in his opinion, the communiqué issued ten days earlier had received and the conviction that the "duit must have 'created difficulties for the enemies', he reiterated Mussolini's 'firm conviction' of the 'opportunity in the near future and at a favorable moment' to proceed with the formulation of the "Charter" and its solemn presentation during a meeting of the leaders of the Axis countries and with the participation of all the representatives of the Tripartite powers." Eight days later, during a new meeting in Berchtesgaden and Klessheim with Hitler, Lavai, and von Ribbentrop dedicated to examining the French and European situation in general, he reiterated once again, also on behalf of Mussolini, the request. But, of course, without obtaining any concrete result, except for von Ribbentrop's reply that he would discuss it with the Führer, but that in any case, for the time being, the German side remained firm "on the considerations expressed at the last conference.". A third attempt to raise the issue was made on June 1 by Alfieri during a meeting with the German Foreign Minister on the third anniversary of Italy's entry into the war. Although lengthy, the section devoted to it in the report that the ambassador sent to Rome the following day seems to us to deserve to be reproduced in its entirety. In fact, it shows very clearly both how Berlin assessed the European situation and the problems that the "Continental Charter" would

have caused, and how the German side, perhaps fearing some even more "untimely" and "dangerous" Italian initiative, or even that Rome was looking for a pretext to break away from the alliance and try to present itself in the least disadvantageous way possible in negotiations with the Allies, tried not to give its refusal the character of a definitive rejection of the proposal. Under the heading "European collaboration," Alfieri reported in his report: Referring to the part of my interlocutor's presentation that referred to small neutral or occupied countries, I returned, following the precise instructions of the Undersecretary of State, to the question of European cooperation, referring to the Salzburg communiqué, to the reception it had received in Europe, and making specific reference to the letter that Undersecretary Bastianini had written at the time to Minister von Ribbentrop. The latter replied, confirming his well-known point of view that in the current situation the only way forward and the only useful course of action was military action, adding that, once military success had been achieved, a European settlement could be implemented "with a quick stroke of the pen." I replied that, while this may be true in the case of a major and decisive military success, such as to decide the outcome of the conflict and ensure victory for the Axis, the situation is very different in the case of significant but not decisive military successes. I therefore argued that it would be psychologically necessary to exploit the significance of minor successes by formulating a general declaration that would constitute the Axis's response to the Atlantic Charter. Von Ribbentrop maintained his point of view. He added that such an initiative would be interpreted as a sign of weakness. In this regard, he noted that Bastianini's speech, which went further than he had intended, was interpreted in enemy countries and even in neutral countries as a change of course by the Axis and, in any case, as a sign of weakness. Ribbentrop believed he found confirmation of this inthe attitude taken by Romania and Hungary, where Mihail Antonescu and Kallay remain in their posts despite Germany's clear reservations. Further illustrating his point of view, he then pointed out that a declaration on the future of Europe would be useless if it remained vague and would become dangerous if it went into detail. In this regard, he cited as an example that, if the current arrangement in Transylvania were to be proclaimed definitive, it would provoke catastrophic reactions in both Bucharest and Budapest; similar complications would arise if the borders between Serbia and Bulgaria were to be defined at this stage; and, finally, any possibility of cooperation on the part of France would be ruled out if Italy's claims regarding Tunisia, Nice, and Corsica, which were fully recognized by Germany, were to be set out in a European Charter. Ribbentrop finally asked what specific concrete content Italy would give to the planned declaration. Referring to France as an example, he argued that the day France felt even slightly freer than it is now, it would immediately take advantage of that freedom to fight the Axis, so that, in order to keep it quiet, Germany would have to deploy a number of divisions twice thethe current number. He recalled that at the last meeting in Salzburg, Undersecretary Bastianini himself had to intervene with great firmness against Lavai for some of his statements. The various other occupied countries would behave in a similar way to France, whose 'active' energies are without exception directed against the Axis countries and therefore, according to Ribbentrop, force, and only force, is the method to be used to impose itself on Europe. In the last world war, Germany wanted to try another system, creating an independent Poland in the hope of gaining some divisions, but that hope

went up in smoke and the military collaboration of that country was then nil. I replied that the German method of force and keeping many countries in subjection may be valid for a certain period of time, but that in the long run, as is already happening, this system leads to serious complications and cannot last. I added that it is easy to see how, for some time now, the occupied countries and even the neutral ones have adopted an attitude towards the Axis, and specifically towards Germany, which shows that they are submitting to the current regime of force only because they are not yet able to react, and I argued that it would be much more effective for the Axis to create a new atmosphere in order to seek much more active and much more convinced cooperation from the above-mentioned countries than they are currently giving, so that, while military operations are taking place on the battlefields, politics may accompany that work for the construction of the new Europe, which is the main purpose of the Axis war. I added that it is necessary to give the peoples who have endured sacrifices, privations, and persecutions for four years a glimmer of light, to say a word that comes from the spirit and goes to the spirit, in order to lay the foundations for an effective civil coexistenceexistence, that is, to create a coincidence between the interests of the Axis and those of the individual other countries. Ribbentrop insisted on his point of view, so I asked him if Germany was so sure and calm about the situation in the occupied countries, even in view of the prolongation of the war. I observed that it had not yet been established whether the German point of view was more correct than the Italian one, concluding finally by expressing the opinion that a meeting point Ministry of Foreign Affairs "Continental Charter" and with it also on the question of the "New Order" as an aspect of Italian-German relations. Since the Allied landing in French North Africa, however, Mussolini, in order to induce Hitler to end the war against the USSR, had focused much more on initiatives such as the "Continental Charter," which, if it had exerted any influence at all, would have been in negotiations with the Allies, particularly with London, mainly on Japanese aid. In the complete absence of studies on Italian-Japanese relations during the years of Japan's participation in World War II, this may seem strange and be considered proof of what is generally asserted, namely that Mussolini, faced with the decisive turning pointin the conflict by Rommel's defeat in Egypt, the loss of North Africa, and the victorious Soviet resistance at Stalingrad, instead of realizing that the Axis had now lost the war and, in particular, that there was no longer any possibility for Italy to continue the fight, he clung to the most absurd hopes, such as that of an agreement between Hitler and Stalin and, in this perspective, of being able to count on Tokyo's help. In reality, this is less strange than it may appear at first glance. Firstly, because the Japanese had already been trying for months to act as mediators between the Germans and the Soviets to bring about peace, and Mussolini knew this. More recently, they had been trying to convince Hitler of the need to stabilize a large part of the eastern front defensively in order to make a large part of Germany's forces and war potential available to engage the Anglo-Americans in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Convinced that they wanted to liquidate Italy and then Germany in order to concentrate all their forces against Japan, in early December 1942, the Japanese General Staff presented Berlin and Rome with a two-part document, an "assessment of the situation" and a proposal for "plans to be followed" by the Tripartite, conceived along the lines of this conviction. At almost the same time, the Japanese Foreign

Ministry, partly because it was concerned about the situation in the Mediterranean and Italy in particular, partly because it knew that Mussolini thought the same way and therefore had to assume that he would do his utmost to support its point of view with Hitler, and partly because it was increasingly dissatisfied with the ambassador in Berlin, Oshima, who was now considered "too closely tied to Berlin circles" and "no longer sufficiently oriented to be a reliable and effective interpreter" of its directives, it decided to reassess the ambassadorin Rome, replacing the dull Horikiri, who was dominated by Oshima, with a figure of entirely different political and intellectual stature, an expert on European affairs and Italian problems, and a staunch advocate of the need to strengthen Italian-Japanese cooperation and adopt a firmer and more decisive attitude towards the Germans: Ambassador Shinrokuro Hidaka. The second reason for Mussolini'sMussolini's attitude is that since Japan entered the war at the end of 1941, Italy, and Mussolini in particular, had looked upon the Tripartite Pact with growing interest and sympathy. This was not only because of the resounding successes achieved by the Japanese against their common enemies, which gave rise to high hopes for the outcome of the conflict, but also because many in Rome were convinced that within the Tripartite Pact it would be possible to establish a sort of privileged relationship between Italy and Japan, which, as already mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, could allow Italy to regain influence over Germany (or, at least, contain its excessive power), give new life to its Middle East political strategy, and establish a counter-insurance for the post-war period, when the conflict of interests between Rome and Berlin in the Near and Middle East would inevitably come to light and Japan would not be able to ignore it, given that it would also affect the struggle for hegemony over the Indian subcontinent and the Persian Gulf, which, would just as inevitably arise between Tokyo and Berlin, if not between Tokyo on the one hand and Berlin and London on the other. For at the root of relations between Germany and Japan there were, throughout the war, two reasons for resentment and friction in Hitler that made those relations unclear and that, once the war was won, could not but worsen. One reason was political and, all things considered, more connected to the immediate situation, to the war: the Japanese had precipitated and perhaps determined the active participation of the United States in the conflict and had not attacked the Soviet Union; the other was ideological-racial: the Japanese were not of the Aryan race and therefore, in Hitler's eyes, 'inferior' not only to the Germans but also to other Aryan peoples, primarily the British. These were two reasons that were difficult (the first, especially as the war against the USSR dragged on and disrupted all of Hitler's plans) or even impossible (the second) to forget and which would certainly have exacerbated the conflict between Germany and Japan over the definition of their respective 'living spaces' and, therefore, world hegemony. For this, in the final analysis, would have been the case once the Tripartite achieved victory. Italian documentation offers numerous elements confirming this and clearly shows how Rome closely followed Germany's attitude towards Japan and the Japanese reactions, ready to insert itself into the game between Berlin and Tokyo to exploit it to its own advantage. Only three months after Pearl Harbor, Alfieri, in a secret report to Ciano, was already talking about "local feelings of concern towards the Japanese ally' and ventured the hypothesis that the Germans wanted to exploit the Japanese card to make the British understand the 'catastrophe' that their empire would face now that

Japan had also entered the war against them, but also the possibility of avoiding it with an agreement between "Aryans." A few days later, Prince Urach, director of the Italy and Far East section of the Wilhelmstrasse intelligence service, arrived in Rome with the clear dual purpose of sounding out and guiding theItalian attitude. A note drafted by the Foreign Minister's office on March 1, at the conclusion of the conversations with Urach, clearly reveals Berlin's position and shows how, while not wanting to reveal itself, Rome did not agree with it at all: After a few references to matters of secondary importance, he began his conversation by stating that the resounding Japanese victories in the East were causing considerable concern among German leaders and a certain disorientation among the public given the threat that was emerging for European civilization and economy as a result of Japan's progressive conquests, all achieved at the expense of 'white men'. According to Urach, this state of affairs was further aggravated by the fact that the United States, now taking over from the British Empire on other continents, was contributing to worsening the future position ofEurope, which lacked raw materials and markets that, in his opinion, could not be satisfactorily secured even by a complete victory over Russia. In relation to this situation, Urach asked to know what the Italian reactions were. I replied that the Japanese victories were generally viewed with great satisfaction, as it was considered here that the struggle was now decisively engaged by all the forces of the Tripartite, in accordance with the precise commitments made in Berlin by the three signatory powers, to end Anglo-Saxon dominance in the world, and that Japan had proved to be a powerful and efficient instrument for achieving this common goal. Regarding his personal observations on Japanese action, I felt I should point out that they were not entirely new to me. These could be gleaned from theattitude of some sectors of the German press and from the Führer's own message to the Old Guard of the Party, which contained significant references to the general interests of the "Aryan race" that should induce England itself to reconsider its position in order to save what remained of the Empire in some way. From the interest with which Urach received my remark and from his affirmative response, I gained the impression that this was precisely the "main" topic of his approach. This was then confirmed when he came to talk to me about the draft declaration on theindependence of India and the Arab countries, on which he also asked for our opinion. Having told him that, again in the context of an all-out struggle against England, such declarations were considered very appropriate here, so much so that our competent offices had long since prepared and sent all the relevant material to Berlin, Urach did not hide his opinion that such a stance would undoubtedly mean, in practical terms: for India, that the Axis Powers recognized and endorsed from that moment on an inevitable "yellow" dominance in that sector as well, given that Japan would have effective control and protection of Indian "independence"; for the Arab countries, that Italy and Germany intended to exclude England definitively in this sector as well, which would provoke further British hardening. After further references to these issues, Urach concluded by stating that it was difficult to judge at this stage which solution would be best: to side closely with Japan, seeking guarantees of possible participation in the exploitation of its conquests (in this regard, he said that confidential negotiations conducted by the German government in Tokyo had so far been unsuccessful), or to glimpse some other possible way out to maintain the 'higher standard of living' for

which Italy and Germany were fighting. 'The answers to these questions,' Urach finally said, 'cannot be found by us until the results of the certainly hard and arduous spring offensive are known. In the meantime, it is desirable that close contacts be maintained between Rome and Berlin regarding thepolitical approach of Axis propaganda on these issues, which are so pressing for the future of Europe." And in early August, it was Hitler himself, speaking with Alfieri about the major problems that the Axis would have to face after victory and, therefore, the need "for Italy and Germany to immediately renew their friendship and alliance pact for as long as possible to guarantee the fruits of their common sacrifice," to include among them that of relations with Japan, with which, he said, "it is essential that we continue, even after the war, to maintain the closest cooperation if we do not want to risk losing our victory." And he did not hide his disappointment at the fact that Europe "and indirectly also Germany" would have to resign themselves to the "loss of territories and markets in the Far East and India itself," and therefore the absolute necessity of "compensating for the damage" by exploiting the "enormous riches that Russia promises." This was the German attitude; as for the Japanese attitude, a note from the Foreign Ministry compiled in April 1942 on the basis of information received "in a strictly confidential and secret manner" from Colonel Shimizu, who in his capacity as military attaché in Rome had participated in a series of meetings of Japanese military attachés in Europe convened to examine the situation and relations with Germany and Italy, reports that on that occasion the Japanese had made numerous criticisms of Germany and a position had emerged characterized by four main elements: "a certain sense of distrust towards Germany"; "a lively reaffirmation of Japanese political and military autonomy vis-à-vis Berlin"; a "sense of the danger that a Europe completely dominated and controlled by a victorious Germany could present for Japan, which tomorrow, undisturbed by European concerns, could become a worrying antagonist in the necessarily complicated task of exploiting, organizing, and controlling East Asia and, in any case, whenever that may be, become an interpreterand advocate of a possible white revenge against the yellow race"; and, finally, a "consequent Japanese tendency to support all those states in continental Europe that could in some way constitute resistance and an obstacle tounchallenged German domination in Europe, and first and foremost the element judged to be the most vital and friendly: Italy." In order to understand and correctly evaluate this group of documents, it is necessary to refer to some little-known or hitherto ignored facts that, directly or indirectly, were behind them. First of all, it is important to bear in mind the increasingly heavy shadow cast over relations between Berlin and Tokyo by the Russian question. A shadow that did not weighon those between Rome and Tokyo and which became increasingly dense during 1942, both because of the progress of operations on the Russian front, which now led Hitler to expect that they would have to continue into the following year, and because, in March, Japan set as one of the main objectives of its policy to work towards a mediation that would end the conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union and, to this end, undertook various steps and soundings with Berlin and personally with Hitler himself (first in March and then again in August) that came to nothing, irritated the Führer, and alarmed those of his collaborators who were considering an agreement with Moscow and had already made secret contacts to this end. They feared that the Japanese were seeking compensation through their mediation

that would make any negotiations with the Soviets more difficultor whose burden would fall on Germany, and indirectly contributed to new shadows being cast over the old ones. Another reason that clouded relations between Tokyo and Berlin, and which must be borne in mind, was the Indian question and its links with the Middle East. We will dwell on this at greater length shortly, since, among the various issues on the table between Berlin and Tokyo, it was the one that Rome most sought to to insert itself and to orient it according to its own political strategy and its own Middle Eastern objectives. It is appropriate to mention immediately the question of the nature and extent (or, if you prefer, the limits) of military collaboration between the Tripartite powers, even if this was not so much an issue in itself as, on the one hand, an indirect manifestation of the other more important issues on the table between the Germans and the Japanese and, on the other hand, the general framework for those issues. In Tokyo, on December 20, 1940, it had been agreed that, within the framework of the newly signed Tripartite Pact, general commissions and joint technical commissions would be set up in each of the three capitals to coordinate joint action in the political, military, and economic fields. However, the decision had not been followed up in practice, especially after negotiations between Tokyo and Washington and the development of Japanese-Soviet relations had reducedJapan's interest in the Tripartite Pact and raised a series of questions in Germany about Tokyo's actual intentions. In Rome, for example, between April and May 1941, the Military Commission was established and its rules of procedure were drawn up; however, the various issues that were theoretically within its remit and of most interest to Rome and Tokyo continued to be dealt with outside it, through normal diplomatic channels or between Japanese military attachés and the Supreme Command or military ministries. Once Japan entered the war, on January 18, 1942, more precise military agreements were signed between Germany, Italy, and Japan, which also provided for better defined forms and bodies of coordination, including the establishment in Berlin of a Permanent Tripartite Council and three military commissions, one in each of the three capitals, which were to oversee the implementation of the agreements and keep the Permanent Council informed. The initiative to propose a basic text for the agreements was taken by the Japanese at the end of December 1941. The politically significant point of this text immediately aroused Berlin's concerns, so much so that at first it considered not accepting it, seeing in it proof that Japan was aiming to extend its hegemony beyond the Dutch East Indies (which the Germans had their eyes on), but also over the whole of India. This point was the division of the areas of operations indicated by the Japanese, a division that clearly anticipated the large 'living space' that Tokyo envisaged for the post-war period and which, perhaps, even indicated, with all-Eastern subtlety, the possible margin for 'negotiability' of the same. If, on the one hand, it was undoubtedly valid from a strategic point of view (so much so that Berlin, when it was persuaded to accept, apparently also due to Mussolini's urging 'not to offend' the Japanese, tried to preserve a possible future space for political maneuvering by having von Keitel sign it, thus attributing only military value to it), on the other hand, theinsistence with which the draft demarcated the areas of operation of the Axis and Japan at the 700 meridian could not, equally undoubtedly, fail to have political significance: The Japanese Army, Navy, and the Italian and German Armed Forces shall conduct military operations within the areas assigned to them as follows. Japan The

waters east of 700 Longitude East to the western coasts of the American continent and the continents and islands included therein (Australia, Dutch Indies, New Zealand, etc.). The Asian continent east of 700 East Longitude. Italy and Germany The waters west of 700 East Longitude to the eastern coast of the American continent and the continents and islands included therein (Africa, Iceland, etc.). The Near and Middle East,Europe west of the 700th meridian east. In the Indian Ocean, operations may also be conducted beyond the line established above, depending on the situation. The first meeting of the Permanent Council was held on February 24 under the chairmanship of von Ribbentrop and with the participation, among others, of the two ambassadors in Berlin, Oshima and Alfieri, as heads of delegation. Among the items on the agenda were the definition of the tasks of the military commissions, initially intended to collect and exchange information on enemy military forces, the study and implementation of maritime and air links between Europe and Greater East Asia, the exchange of inventions and military experience, and theinterruption of supplies of war material and raw materials of strategic interest to the enemy. However, only on the last two points was a real agreement reached. While the Italians had shown themselves to be willing and interested in maritime and air links, the Germans had tried to avoid or at least postpone making any specific commitments. The real point of friction, although unspoken, was the first item on the agenda. At that time , Tokyo had not yet taken the decision to commit itself to trying to bring Germany and the USSR to the peace negotiating table. Nevertheless, Oshima could certainly not agree to include information on the Soviet armed forces among the information on enemy military forces to be collected and exchanged, as the Germans insistently demanded. He could not accept it, but he could not say so in so many words either, so in order to sidestep the thorny issue, he resorted to a series of 'technical' arguments, on the basis of which he then suggested postponing the decision in order to study and regulate it better. Nor were the differences limited to the tasks to be assigned to the military commissions. When the proposal to set up a Propaganda Commission was discussed, the Japanese, supported by the Italians, wanted the military to be part of it ('to take care of the propaganda of 'moral disintegration' of the opposing armed forces'), which von Ribbentrop had reluctantly accepted, 'evidently concerned, as Alfieri would report to Palazzo Chigi in his report sent the following day, also highlighting how during the meeting 'some differences of opinion between the Germans and the Japanese' had immediately emerged regarding the introduction of military elements into a political body that he wished, for obvious reasons, to keep under the direct control of the Auswärtiges Amt." Finally, as regards more strictly political issues, and in particular the question of India and Japanese intentions in relation to it, von Ribbentrop had tried in vain to initiate a discussion. As stated in Alfieri's aforementioned report, with regard to Japanese views on developments in the war in the East, especially with regard to the Indian situation, Oshima avoided giving any indication, even though Ribbentrop had offered him the opportunity to do so. And, as a final touch, the fact that, in order to avoid unpleasant surprises, Oshima (who, it should be noted, was not staunchly anti-German, so much so that in the following months he would even be accused of being pro-German or, at least, too willing to accept theBerlin's point of view) personally wanted to participate in the drafting of the final communiqué, which the Germans considered very important "for propaganda

reasons," clearly demonstrates the atmosphere in which the meeting took place. Based on the available documentation, it is difficult to determine whether the fact that, since the first meeting of the Permanent Council of the Tripartite, the Italians had taken positions on individual issues that were closer to those of the Japanese than to those of the Germans was the result of independent assessments by the Italian members (in addition to Alfieri, and therefore above all General Marras) or whether it was in response to a specific line of conduct dictated by Rome. What is certain is that the atmosphere between the Italians and the Japanese in those days was very different from that between the Germans and the Japanese. Japan's entry into the war was welcomed in Rome not only by Mussolini but also by the military. Typical of this is what Cavallero had already written on December 9 to General Bastico, commander of the forces in North Africa: Meanwhile, the general situation has improved significantly with Japan's intervention. It is likely thatfrom now on that England will have serious difficulties in replacing the ships and aircraft that will be out of service. Although the same cannot be said for ground forces, it is certain that England's overall war potential in the Mediterranean is destined to diminish, while ours is growing with the addition of a powerful air force and insidious naval assets. Even thepossible use of French bases should, in my opinion, come much closer because the fear of a possible British reaction against the French colonies will increasingly lose its substance. Nor did the Supreme Command limit itself to waiting for the Japanese intervention to bear its beneficial fruit. A few days before the meeting of the Permanent Council, Cavallero, having decided to study the preparation of the occupation of Malta as soon as possible, proposed to Mussolini that, in addition to the Germans, the Japanese also be asked to collaborate by contributing their experience in landing operations. The first meetings took place on February 21 and 22 with the highest possible Japanese participation in Italy at that time,Admiral Abe, head of the Japanese naval mission, and military attachés, in a relaxed atmosphere of full cooperation. Shortly thereafter, both the Air Force and the Navy began studying the problem of connections between Italy and Japan. Despite the great difficulties, Rome attached considerable importance to them, both from a practical point of view, to secure supplies of raw materials (such as rubber) which the Italian economy desperately needed, as well as in terms of enhancing Italy's image in Japan and in comparison with Germany. The first air link was established in July by a three-engine SM 75GA, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Nino Moscatelli, which took off from Rome on June 29 and, after two stopovers, one at a base in Russia and another in Manchuria, arrived in Tokyo on July 3, from where it returned to Rome on July 20 with a cargo of goods, particularly quinine. Despite its success, the connection was not continued. To reach the Far East, the plane had flown thousands of kilometers over Soviet territory. The Japanese, concerned about possible complications with Moscow, had wanted the flight to be kept secret and asked that the second flight, scheduled for October, take a different route, passing over India and Burma (which further increased the difficulties), and then (probably so as not to disappoint the Italians too much, who wanted at least to carry out a bombing raid over India, , which Tokyo did not consider appropriate), that it be postponed for five or six months. Thus, the undertaking of Lieutenant Colonel Moscatelli and his crew, although fully successful, was not followed up and was reduced to little more than a major sporting exploit. Although at a

very high price, the Navy achieved greater results. Circumnavigating Africa, some ships (the Pietro Orseolo three times) managed to escape the British blockade and transport a certain quantity of materials and raw materials to and from Japan. Towards the end of theyear, as the blockade became more impenetrable and the need to obtain certain raw materials at any cost became more pressing, not only for Italy but also for Germany, it was decided to build twelve cargo submarines in addition to the four already under construction, partly to supply North Africa and partly for use in the oceans. At the beginning of 1943, while waiting for them to be built, the transformation (also requested by the Germans) of the surviving large ocean-going submarines into transport submarines, capable of carrying 140 to 240 tons of material each. Once the necessary work had been completed, between May 16 and June 16, five of them set sail for Singapore loaded with aluminum, special steel, mercury, optical and electrical instruments, war material, and with the task of loading mainly rubber on the return journey. A sixth, which was to be converted into a transport in Singapore, set sail at the end of June, so it was caught by the armistice while at sea and surrendered in Durban. Of the others, three reached Malaysia, where, on September 1, before they began their return journey, they were captured by the Japanese; two were lost during the outward journey . Despite the clear and relaxed climate of Italian-Japanese relations, the broad uniformity of political and strategic views, and the absence of reasons for conflict or even mistrust after the war, it is certainly not possible to speak of a truly privileged relationship between Italy and Japan as long as the fortunes of war were generally in favor of the Tripartite. Mussolini, partly certainly due to his hostility towards the Germans and as a counterbalance to them, but above all because he considered it important for the realization of his Middle East policy, sought it in every way (characteristic of this is the emphasis given by the mass media to the Asian ally, its military successes, but also to its culture, its ties, even remote ones, with Italy, the virtues of its people, and the many initiatives for "Italian-Japanese friendship" taken in almost all fields and at all levels4) and was keen to flaunt his Japanophilia. Mussolini authorized the use of the services of Colonel Cesare Sacerdoti of the Naval Engineers, who had been retired due to the racial laws, for the construction of submarines. See W. Ghetti, Storia della Marina italiana nella seconda guerra mondiale, II, Milan 1968, pp. 848 ff. The Japanese also sent supplies by submarine to both Germany and Italy. According to the available sources, the only information available concerns a submarine carrying a cargo of quinine for Italy, which was sunk (see NAW, Collection of Italian Military Records, I.T., 1137, "Reports by Japanese Military Attachés," Ambrosio-Shimizu conversation, March 6, 1943). See G. Ciano, Diario cit., pp. 593, 595,597, 599, 609 (February 22 and 25, March 3 and 11, April 1942). See ibid., p. 599 (March 7, 1942). Useful information can be found in V. Ferretti, Politica e cultura: origini e attività dell'iSMEO durante il regime fascista, in "Contemporary History," September-October 1986, pp. 779 ff. For the evolution of attitudes toward Japan, see especially the journals Asiatica (published by ISMEO), Relazioni internazionali (published by ISPI) and Yamato (published by the Association for Italian-Japanese Friendship), as well as G. C. Castagna, L'ora del Giappone, Venice 1932; G. M. Sangiorgi, L'imperialismo giapponese, Bologna 1932; G. C. Castagna, Il posto del Giappone nel mondo (Japan's Place in the World), Venice 1934; G. C. Majoni, Problemi giapponesi (Japanese Problems), Rome 1934; L. Barzini, Il Giappone in armi

(Japan in Arms), Piacenza 1935; U. Caipenta, Giappone avanza (Cina-Giappone), Milan 1935; C. Pestalozza, Cina, Giappone, Russia asiatica, Milan 1938; G. C. Castagna, L'evoluzione del Giappone, s.l. 1936; C. Tomaselli, Ecco il Giappone (Here is Japan), Milan 1936; C. Vian, Il Giappone (Japan), Rome 1936; D. Bartoli, There can be no doubt about its sincerity; the direct and indirect evidence proving this is too abundant, consistent and, more importantly, spread over a much longer period than that covered by the war, from the entry into force of the Tripartite Pact to the policy of friendship that preceded it. Even before coming to power, on more than one occasion, Mussolini had said he was convinced that the 20th century would be the "Asian century." Europe had evokedAsia, and Asia had set itself in motion. On February 6, 1921, at the first conference of the Fasci della Venezia Giulia in Trieste, Japan had said that it was destined to act as a catalyst for the entire yellow world, while it was not certain that Isaac Rufus, who had become Lord Reading and Viceroy of India, would succeed in saving British imperialism in those lands. A "formidable struggle' was setting the Islamic peoples, India, and Japan in motion; this would lead to the decline of European hegemony, a shift in interests, the exploitation of immense wealth, and probably an eclipse of the 'European role' in world history: The axis of world civilization is shifting. Until 1500, it was in the Mediterranean; from 1492 onwards, with the discovery of America, it moved to the Atlantic; today, its transition to the largest ocean on the planet is announced... It can well be said that with war and through war, the history of mankind has acquired a global rhythm. While Europe, "bled dry', struggled to regain its economic, political, and spiritual balance, in the Pacific 'formidable antitheses of interests' between the United States and Japan were emerging, so that 'what is looming is a war between continents for dominance of the Pacific'. The crisis in China. Origins and current developments (1842-1938), Milan 1938; G. C. Castagna, China, Japan, 1938, Notes and comments, Venice 1939; M. Catalano, The hour of the Pacific, Milan 1939; O. Di Collalto, The Japan I saw, Rome 1939; G. Ducci, The Pacific, Florence 1939; C. Avarna di Gualtieri, Japanese Politics of the "New Order," Milan-Messina 1940; M. Catalano, Dai Nippon. The Great Japan, Florence 1940; G. Stramigioli, Japan, Milan 1940; N. Appelius, Cannons and Cherry Blossoms. Modern Japan, Verona 1942; G. Cora, Japan and the "Greater East Asia," Florence 1942; C. Formichi, Nippon, 1942; Japan. Volume dedicated to Italian-Japanese friendship, Rome 1942; A. Nacci, Japan on the march, Milan-Rome 1942; R. Simoni, China and Japan, Milan 1942. See especially Mussolini, XVI, pp. 150 ff. (speech of February 6, 1921); XVII, pp. 120 ff. (September 4, 1921). An opinion of Japan similar in some respects to that of Mussolini was also expressed by D'Annunzio in articles on the Washington Naval Conference written for the New York American, which published them between November 18, 1921, and April 20, 1922, and reprinted in Italy by the Gazzetta del Popolo of Turin, particularly in the third and fourth of them, Il sorriso del commodoro Perry (Commodore Perry's Smile) and Il gavitello veglia (The Buoy Watches), December 4 and 7, 1921. However, the occasion for which they were written and the dates on which they appeared rule out any influence on Mussolini's speech in Trieste and on the article we have cited. Nor can we think of any influence from the speech in Centocelle on July 9, 1919, during which D'Annunzio (who had already been thinking for several months about a Rome-Tokyo-Rome flight in ten or twelve stages) had spoken of Italy's Asian task, but in a completely different key: that of an Italy "disappointed' and 'betrayed' by the

'degenerate' West, which was turning 'once again to the East, where the gaze of its proudest centuries was fixed'. On this whole 'Asian' issue and for the extremely positive assessment of Japan and its historical task by D'Annunzio and its subsequent developments, as well as for the texts of the articles that appeared in the New York American, see E. mariano, Il San Francesco di Gabriele D'Annunzio, in Quaderni del Vittoriale, no. 12, November-December 1978. Once in power, Mussolini's language became more cautious; for a decade or more, he rarely touched on the subject of Japan. This does not mean, however, that he changed his opinion; on the contrary, it is very likely that during these years, and in particular between the end of the second decade and the beginning of the third, Mussolini's ideas on the subject had become more precise and organized around certain fundamental concepts from which he would never deviate and which it is important to bear in mind in order to understand his love of Japan and how it was certainly "political" but also "ideological." If we consider the importance that the demographic problem and the idea of the 'new man' that fascism was supposed to create, it is easy to understand how some of his references to Japan during those same years went beyond the contingencies of daily politics (even if they were sometimes inspired by it) and the underlying conflict between those within the regime who favored a pro-Chinese political line and those who, on the other hand, were already thinking of a pro-Japanese line, and while having to take into account a series of foreign and domestic policy considerations (which sometimes made them tortuous, to the point of arousing concern and even protests from the Japanese side), expressed a fundamental choice of an ideological nature. Particularly significant in this regard are some of his articles and speeches from 1933-34 are particularly significant in this regard. They clearly show thatMussolini's admiration for Japan was based on certain virtues that the 'Duce' attributed to its people: 'highly prolific', Japan was 'a sober people, with strong warrior virtues and an unlimited capacity for sacrifice'. To many, even in Italy, it was precisely these virtues, together with Japan's ability to overcome the 'great crisis' of 1929 before and better than other countries of 1929, with its overflowing commercial dynamism and the aggression it was displaying in Manchuria, evoked and revived the image of the "yellow peril," sometimes even bringing them close to and even crossing the threshold of racism. Nothing of the sort can be found in Mussolini. Faced with the prospect that if the yellow and "mixed" races continued to increase "at a rate five or six times greater than that of the white races," "our grandchildren will have to... be rare nantes in a sea of saffron," his position remained, on closer inspection, that of 1921: not one of alarm, of denunciation of the 'yellow peril', but of inviting whites and Europeans in particular to 'meditate' on this prospect (which he believed was always caused by the crisis in Europe) and, therefore, on the situation they would find themselves in and to remedy it by achieving a minimum of political unity that would allow Europe to "attempt to regain the helm of universal civilization." The tumultuous awakening of Asia and therefore of Japan, "which, after coming into contact with Europe through the war of 1905, is advancing in great strides towards the West," and, conversely, the emergence of the idea "of an Asia hostile to Europe" were to be blamed on the particularism and materialism of the capitalist-liberal civilization that had conceived of relations with the Eastonly in terms of subordination and exploitation and which was "incapable or indifferent to understanding Asia." The failure of this civilization had also

produced the psychosis of the "yellow peril." According to Mussolini, this is much less paradoxical today than when it was announced a few decades ago. Today, there is no military-political yellow peril; there is fierce Japanese competition in all world markets, including European markets. The "yellow peril" will always be a fantasy, provided that the great powers of the white West achieve political cooperation, provided that an attempt is made at "mediation," not in the vulgar sense of the word, between the two types of civilization. If this was the official position, so to speak, of Mussolini 'statesman', of Mussolini the supporter of the 'Four-Power Pact', the revolutionary leader and 'theorist of fascism' went further and was already thinking, rather than about the realization of an improbable "mediation" between the two civilizations, about a connection, a front between those in the West and East who opposed capitalist-liberal civilization for some reason. Significant in this regard is a passage from his speech on December 22, 1933, to Asian students gathered in Rome: This civilization based on capitalism and liberalism in past centuries has swept across the world. Its failure therefore has repercussions on all continents. The reaction against liberal and capitalist degeneration is therefore of interest to all continents, a reaction that finds its expression in the revolutionary faith of Italian fascism, which has fought and continues to fight against the lack of soul and ideals of this civilization, which has prevailed in the world in recent centuries. In the evils complaints of Asia, in its resentments and reactions, we see a reflection of "our own face." The difference is in form and detail; the foundation is the same. Today, Rome and the Mediterranean, with the Fascist rebirth, a rebirth that is above all spiritual, are turning to resume their unifying function. That is why the new Italy, this Italy, has summoned you here. As on other occasions, in times of mortal crisis, the civilization of the world was saved by the collaboration of Rome and the East, so today, in the crisis of an entire system of institutions and ideas that no longer have a soul and live as if embalmed, we, Italians and Fascists of this era, hope to resume the common, millennial tradition of our constructive collaboration. From this perspective, the fact that Japan did not have a Fascist-type regime was secondary to Mussolini. As he wrote in Il Popolo d'Italia on October 6, 1937, Japan is not "formally" Fascist, but its anti-Bolshevik attitude, the direction of its politics, and the style of its people place it among the fascist states. Also significant is a note in Nino D'Aroma's notebooks'Aroma's notebooks, referring to March 1938: A Tokyo newspaper requested an interview on Italian-Japanese relations. Mussolini wrote [the answers] in advance to the long list of questions submitted to him and reread them to Ciano and me, who were sitting in front of him. Ciano is pro-Chinese and clearly turns up his nose at Mussolini's unconcealed sympathy for the Japanese people ... Mussolini deliberately reads his interview ostentatiously, precisely because he knows Galeazzo's moods... As a conclusion on the East and Europe, he observes as he takes his leave: "The East is the matrix, Europe is the act, and in thought, the act is science. Asia is female and the West is male. It takes both to make the world." With this, let us be clear, we do not mean to say that Mussolini, as early as the beginning of the 1930s or even with the signing of the "Anti-Comintern Pact" in 1937, had aimed for an alliance with Japan. Such a statement would in fact not only be unprovable, but also in contrast with his policy towards England until 1939-40. What we feel it is appropriate to draw attention toattention is the timing and motivations of his Japanophilia

and, therefore, the peculiarity of the commitment that, once Japan entered the war, he put into enhancing Japan's image in the eyes of Italians and in considering relations with Tokyo much more important than one might think, given the distance between the two countries and the lack of direct links between their respective war fronts. To the point of trying to establish with the Japanesea sort of privileged relationship which, although it had very strong motivations in terms of his political strategy and psychological condition, was nevertheless rooted in an ideological humus that cannot be underestimated and that was completely lacking in almost all of his collaborators who were supposed to work to achieve it. A large part of the economic world did not share Mussolini's love for Japan or, at least, viewed it with concern. A typical is the case of Ettore Conti ("I do not have much sympathy for Japan because, as a producer, I consider it a very dangerous competitor") and the extraordinary mission entrusted to him by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Trade and Currency in the spring of 1938 to conclude trade agreements with Japan and Manchukuo. Wanted above all by Mussolini, the mission not only failed to arouse any interest in the industrial world, which in theory was most interested in developing trade between the two countries, but also in Minister Guarneri. As we read in Conti's notebooks, Guarneri did not have high hopes for a positive outcome of the mission. Italy and Japan's economies were too similar to be able to integrate with each other. Our trade balance with Japan was in deficit, and it would already be a success to break even by increasing the trade surplus slightly.Guarneri had previously promoted meetings with industrialists who should be interested in trade with Japan, but without obtaining any practical advice. If the attitude of Conti and Guarneri can be explained by the fact that they were essentially supporters rather than true fascists and, moreover, representatives of a world that put its own business and interests above all else their own interests above all else, the same explanation cannot be given for Alberto De Stefani. The former Minister of Finance was in fact a full-fledged fascist, and his relations with the economic world were much less organic than those of Conti and Guarneri and not without friction. Yet De Stefani, who in 1937 had found himself in China as a senior advisor to Chiang Kai-shek (a position never before conferred on a foreigner and for which he had been personally chosen by the generalissimo) and had carried out intense activity there with the aim of improving the economic organization and public powers. From China, he had sent articles to La Stampa that were so clearly pro-Chinese that they provoked protests from the Japanese after the Marco Polo Bridge incident, which caused the Sino-Japanese conflict to escalate open war, he had given speeches and interviews supporting Chiang Kai-shek and urging the Chinese to defend their homeland. Nor did his position undergo any substantial changes in the following years. In fact, De Stefani not only maintained excellent relations with the Chinese (to the point that after the war he was able to ask Chiang Kai-shek to support the return of the pre-fascist colonies to Italy), but, more politically much more important and significant, Italy's entry into the war in 1940 caught him as he was about to return to China on a mission whose terms we do not know, but which was probably aimed at trying to settle the conflict between Japan and China. This was a prospect that Ciano had been entertaining for a couple of years and which, at least according to the documentation, does not seem to have been fit in with Mussolini's vision. Among the closest collaborators of the "Duce," Ciano was the one who least shared his

Japanophilia. His diary, punctuated with ironic and sarcastic remarks about it, which he always attributed solely to his father-in-law's frustrations and anti-German ambitions, is eloquent proof of this. This is all the more so given that he was intimately pro-Chinese. Hisexperience he had in China from 1927 to 1933, agH ini2* ^a diplomatic career, and the relationships he maintained with various Chinese figures even after his return to Rome were probably the source of his lack of sympathy for Japan. Once he became foreign minister, he tried, as long as possible, to keep Italian policy toward the two Far Eastern countries on a double track; to some extent, even after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident (July 1937), , he had dreamed of both his own personal mediation and even of getting China to join the Anti-Comintern Pact, thus resolving the issue at its root. Italian participation in this pact and attempts to reach a bilateral agreement between Italy and Japan had found in him a staunch supporter and negotiator, but always and only in the context of Anglo-Italian relations, namely the famous 'general agreement' between Rome and London vainly pursued by Mussolini.1 Later on, his political strategy Inno 1985, pp. 242 ff., where, among other things, a letter from D. Alfieri, then Minister of Popular Culture, to De Stefani dated December 26, 1937, is published, in which he was informed, 'as a rule of language', that it had been 'authoritatively' observed that his article Chi avrà la chiave della porta (Who will have the key to the door) (in La Stampa three days earlier) was "a little too pro-Chinese." Further documentary evidence on De Stefani's stay in China and his relations with that country can be found in De Stefani's own archive, for which see Banca d'Italia Segreteria, Archivio di Alberto De Stefani, Rome 1983, pp. 79 ff., 87 ff. See V. Ferretti, Il Giappone e la politica estera italiana cit., chaps. iv ff.; id., Satò Naotake's mission to Rome in 1940, in Contemporary European writing on Japan, ed. by 1. Nish, Ashford 1988, pp. 76 ff., 263 ff. However, it never happened. The "Tripartite Pact" was born mainly on the initiative of Germany and Japan, at a time when Mussolini still believed in a short war and therefore considered it somewhat of a deterrent that could induce England to take a more moderate stance, a bit like a necessary act. Ciano, for his part, had shared his father-in-law's point of view on the one hand, but on the other hand must have underestimated the possible consequences. He was certainly far from happy when Japan entered the war against the United States the following year. As he noted in his diary, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor meant one thing to him: a prolongation of the conflict and, in the long run, the United States would be able to bring its potential strength to bear, which made him uncertain "about the final advantages of the event'. But even if things had turned out differently in the end, Ciano'sMussolini's ostentatious Japanophilia and to do everything possible not to support it and not to translate it into concrete political initiatives. This was largely due to the fact that Ciano did not share either the ideological motivations or the political prospects, regardless of his pro-Chinese sympathies, which by then were obviously devoid of political significance. Indicative of his position is this note under the date of March 15, 1942: Before his departure I saw Ando, the Japanese advisor who is returning to Tokyo. I entrusted him with a very friendly message for his government, especially since the Japanese are very sensitive and suspicious of German behavior. Here too, some people are emphasizing their pro-Japanese sentiment to spite Germany. I disagree. No one can accuse me of Germanophilia, but I still prefer whites to Asians, and then Japan is far away and

Germany is close, very close...Given Italy's position, it now remains to be seen what Japan's position is. At that time, Tokyo must not have considered a privileged relationship with Rome to be either useful or appropriate; in fact, there was no valid reason for it to risk deteriorating its already unclear and difficult relations with Berlin. At a time when the war was still going well for Japan, it was certainly not Italy that could make an effective contribution (even if only indirect) to its military operations, and above all, the political objective that the Japanese were most focused on was to bring Hitler and Stalin to the negotiating table to settle their conflict. This was all the more so because Tokyo, while lacking reliable information to assess Mussolini's actual position on the matter, had no doubts about the sincerity and reliability of his pro-Japanese sentiment and, more importantly, on the fact that on the only issue for which Italian support could be of real use that of policy towards Indian independence movements and unrest, Rome's line largely corresponded to its own, so that Italian support for it did not need to be solicited; Tokyo also depended almost exclusively on its own representatives in the two capitals for information and assessments of the European situation and the intentions of Rome and Berlin. These representatives were generally ill-suited in terms of mentality and culture to understand them, had little unofficial contact, and, while distrustful of the Germans, was nevertheless fascinated by their military power, organizational skills, and seriousness, qualities that it did not find in the Italians. So much so that when, at the end of 1942 and beginning of 1943, the General Staff and the Foreign Ministry felt the need to have reliable information on the situation and the military plans of the Axis, they were no longer satisfied with what was communicated to them by Oshima, Horikiri, and the military attachés in the two Allied capitals, but sent a leading military figure, General Okamoto, former head of the General Staff's intelligence service, on a special mission to Berlin and Rome and just as they sent Hidaka to Rome, they sent another of the most experienced Foreign Ministry officials to the legation in Bern with the task of organizing and centrally directing the study of the situation throughout the continent. A truly privileged relationship was not achieved even in the summer of 1942, when, with Rommel's advance in Egypt, the Italian card momentarily acquired new importance in the eyes of the Japanese, also especially due to the coincidence of views, at least with regard to the German position and what could be useful to Tokyo with regard to third parties between Italy and Japan concerning India and the Middle East ("this, according to the Duce's thinking, is the real second front," Cavallero told Shimizu and Abe, who had come to explain the operational intentions of the Japanese headquarters in relation to Axis operations): in fact, although the strategic situation in Africa seemed to be changing radically, and with it Italy's role and possibilities for initiative, these remained largely conditioned by Berlin's dominance over Rome, and Italy, when it tried to move in its own direction, had no need to be guided or encouraged by Tokyo, which, once again, rather than forcing things with Berlin, had every interest in letting the Italians act without exposing itself. Nor, on closer inspection, would things have changed substantially when the fortunes of war began to turn increasingly against the Axis and Italy found itself increasingly unable to continue fighting. If it is true, as we have already mentioned, that the Japanese were concerned with "strengthening cooperation" with Italy, striving above all to convince the Germans of the need, as theJapanese chargé d'affaires in Rome, Kase, told von Ribbentrop

when he was in the Italian capital at the end of February 1943, to give operations in the Mediterranean a development more in line with the actual military importance of this sector and emphasizing the opportunity for Germany to involve Italy more closely than in the past in any plans for the reconstruction of future Europe, giving ItalyItaly, without haggling or reservations, the share of advantages that it is effectively entitled to. It is equally true that, in doing so, the Japanese, on the one hand, were motivated by an awareness of theextreme gravity of the situation in Italy and concern about the consequences that its collapse would inevitably have, first for Germany and then for Japan itself, and therefore strove both to strengthen its spirit of resistance and to induce the Germans to commit themselves fully to helping it, on the other hand, however, they also took advantage of Italy's dramatic situation to try to push Berlin to finally consider a series of issues on which it had always been intransigent until then: that of giving positive content to the'New Order', to commit the Tripartite Pact with a public declaration to champion the independence of the Arabs and especially the Indians (because, at this point, it was the Indians that Tokyo was most interested in bringing into its camp), and the need for negotiations with the Soviet Union which, despite Stalingrad, was still considered by the Japanese to be the solution that would once again turn the tide of war and allow the increasingly unlikely victory of the Tripartite. At this point, the last aspect of Italian-Japanese relations to consider is that relating to the Indian question. We already mentioned this in the previous chapter when discussing Middle Eastern political strategy and Mussolini's policy towards the Arabs, but the subject deserves to be revisited and developed, and seen in the context of Arab politics, even in its distant past. Mussolini's interest was only partly a consequence of the war and Japan's intervention: it had deep roots (perhaps even linked to some extent to the thinking of Gustave Le Bon, who had devoted considerable attention in his works to India and the characteristics and limitations of European colonization), although it was with the Second World War that, like that for the Arabs, it took on new characteristics and became, so to speak, operational. The first, and for several years the only, public mention of India and its independence was made by Mussolini in an article in Il Popolo d'Italia on September 4, 1921. The first, and for several years the only, public reference to India and its independence was made by Mussolini in an article in Il Popolo d'Italia on September 4, 1921. The inspiration for this came from a revolt by the Moplah Muslims of Malabar. Taking his cue from this episode and broadening the discussion to include other unrest that had been troubling India for several years, Mussolini observed: "It is clear that England's position in India is quite difficult. We do not believe that the collapse of its domination is imminent, because the metropolis similar developments in the war in the Mediterranean by the Allies and outlined the main countermeasures to be taken. During the meeting, held at Palazzo Venezia, a whole series of problems were examined, which are summarized in the Historical Diary of the Supreme Command as follows: "the connection with submarines between Europe and Asia; the bombing of enemy ports; the probable directions of the enemy attack against Europe; the distinction between landing and invasion; the Russian and Anglo-American offensives; the possibilities of an operation on Gibraltar via Spain; the mood of the Italian people; the difficulties of the enemy; Japanese policy; the Indian question; the oil problem; the situation in China and Japan; the Tripartite strategy. Among

the attachments to the historical diary for June 1943 are both the "Judgment" presented to Mussolini and Ambrosio and a more detailed summary (entitled "Notes on the meeting held at Palazzo Venezia on June 25, 1943-xxi"); see both in Appendix, Document No. 7^. Mussolini, XVII, pp. 120 ff. He will resort to all violent and underhanded means to preserve it, but the outcome of the Indian unrest is marked and fatal. The seeds of unrest have been sown. The race has awakened. And it is standing up. Achieving independence is no longer a question of possibility; it is a question of time. The fact that the "Duce" no longer spoke of India does not mean mean that he did not follow events there, especially given his close relationship with his brother Arnaldo and the influence the latter had on him. In the early years immediately after the 'March on Rome', his interest, as far as we know, was attracted mainly by two figures, Tagore and Gandhi, both already well known in Europe and around the world, albeit for different reasons, the former as a philosopher, poet, storyteller, and Nobel Prize winner, the latter as a politician, albeit of a very particular kind, and theorist of "non-violence." Tagore, in fact, was at the center of a small episode that caused quite a stir at the time and which G. Salvemini reconstructed after the war in a short essay, which is particularly interesting for understanding how, in thethe atmosphere heated by the political passions of those years, certain episodes were exploited by fascists and anti-fascists, without any respect for those who were also involuntary protagonists, for the sole purpose of exploiting the notoriety of a personality in favor of their own cause. The Indian (but rather than the Indian, it would be better to say the universally known and celebrated intellectual, since Tagore's nationality seems to have played any part in the whole affair) was in Italy in May-June 1926 at the invitation of the government. In Rome, he was solemnly received at the Campidoglio and the University, gave a lecture (attended by Mussolini, Luzzatti, and Salandra, among others) and had two meetings with the 'Duce'. The fascist press attributed to him statements of esteem and sympathy for Italy and Mussolini, which his Italian and foreign anti-fascist friends and admirers, including R. Rolland and G. Duhamel, convinced him to contest and explain with his lack of knowledge of Italian and the reality of fascism, without, however, managing to induce him to deny that Mussolini's "dramatic" and "poetic" personality had deeply impressed him. Much more significant is the case of Gandhi. During the early years of fascism, ideas about him were very confused and everyone stretched his figure according to considerations that were entirely political and, in general, related to Italian domestic politics. For D'Annunzio, he was the 'patient and constant messiah of the Indies'. For Giovanni Ansaldo, then an anti-fascist and supporter of Gobetti, Gandhi was, on the one hand, 'a Berlin creation," appropriately relaunched by R. Rolland in the perspective of "Clarté-pacifism-spite towards England"; for another, a sort of alibi for "sluggish" anti-fascists; for yet another, a bogeyman with which the fascists threatened England "with the prospect of the Indies in revolt" and stirred up feelings against her who "does not want to give us Giubaland"; in fact, he was only a denier of progress, while "English rule over India remains the most comforting, Goethean spectacle of world politics." In reality, however, the position of the fascists was much less homogeneous. Schematically, it ranged from that of Mario Appelius, for whom Gandhi was essentially a revolutionary, a great figure who could stand comparison with Lenin and Mussolini and who had more in common with the former than with the latter; to that of those who saw

him as a more or less unwitting instrument of Bolshevism and its attempts to strike at Europe by spreading instability in the East, and in India in particular, by favoring nationalist movements; and finally to that of Arnaldo Mussolini, for whom the passive resistance theorized by Gandhi was ultimately a sort of 'resignation' while waiting for better times. This range of fascist positions must be borne in mind in order to understand both the controversies that arose around the figure of Gandhi in the early 1930s and the influence of the first contacts that began to be established in the mid-1920s between some Indian nationalist leaders and the regime. Key figures in these contacts were a Muslim from Punjab, Mohammed Iqbal Shedai (we have already mentioned in connection with fascism's relations with the Arab-Islamic world) and Arnaldo Mussolini, who, influenced by him, changed his opinion of Gandhi, moving from the essentially negative one mentioned above, in January 1925, to a much more positive one, which he expressed on January 17, 1929, when he inaugurated the local Fascist Institute of Culture in Pavia: Gandhi was the 'prophet' of hundreds of millions of Indians, held in subjection by the British 'with the force of laws and arms' and 'driven towards Fautonomia'. A militant member of the Hindustan Gadar Party since 1914, arrested several times between 1915 and 1919 for his anti-British activities, in 1920 Shedai took refuge in Kabul, from where he moved on to Moscow (which led some to consider him a communist), Ankara, France and, in June 1923, Italy, with a failed attempt an initial attempt at an agreement between his party and the Comintern to make contact with the Italians. In Rome, he met with another Indian nationalist, Maulavi Barakatullah, and came into contact with Dr. Enderle. From Rome, he then went to Milan where, in 1925, he met Fonorevole Lanfranconi, who was interested in the expansion of Italian industry in India. In June 1926, he had his first long meeting at the headquarters of Il Popolo d'Italia with Arnaldo Mussolini, which was followed by several others and with whom he apparently became a close friend. He also came into contact with Piero Parini, then editor of Il Popolo d'Italia, and Colonel Tavazzani of the SIM. In the same year, according to an internal memo written about him by Enderle for Palazzo Chigi, 'he was the first to introduce Nehru to the Fascist leaders'. Despite these contacts, relations between the Hindustan Gadar Party and the regime did not develop for the time being, so much so that at the end of 1926, Shedai was transferred by his party to Marseille with the task of handling propaganda among Indian seafarers. Two years later, he moved from Marseille to Paris, where he served as the party's delegate for Europe for a decade. He was expelled in March 1938 from France as an Italian agent, he moved to Switzerland (where he represented not only his party but also the Indian Mujahidin Party and the Ahrar Party of Waziristan), before moving to Italy in 1941. As with the Arabs, Rome lacked its own Indian policy at that time and was overly cautious in avoiding any missteps with London that could jeopardize its relations with it. Hence, it practically ignored advances of Shedai and instead, a few years later (especially in 1930, after the Labour Congress declared full independence and Gandhi began civil disobedience and was arrested, along with Nehru, by the British), turned its attention to Gandhi, although, for the time being, this was largely for reasons of prestige, to enhance the image of fascism and its culture abroad (significantin this sense is the speed with which the Mahatma's autobiography was translated into Italian, with a preface by G. Gentile) and for a general anti-British spirit, rather than for specific political intentions. It is

in this context that we should view the invitation extended by Italy at the end of 1931 to Gandhi (who had been released from prison in January) to stop off in Rome as a guest of the government on his return to India from London, where he had been participating in Anglo-Indian negotiations for the new constitutional order to be given to his country, to stop in Rome as a guest of the government and meet with Mussolini. Like Tagore's, Gandhi's visit to the Italian capital was controversial, and the Mahatma's biographers all tend to gloss over it and present Gandhi as the victim of a clumsy propaganda stunt by the regime. Gandhi had a meeting with Mussolini on December 2December 2 at Palazzo Venezia. However, it is controversial whether the 'Duce' also gave a reception in his honor at Villa Torlonia. What the two said to each other is not known. On December 15, when Gandhi had already left Italy, Il Giornale d'Italia published an interview he gave to Gayda in which Gandhi stated that he wanted to immediately resume "totalitarian passive resistance" and the boycott of British goods, hoping that through these forms of struggle India would soon achieve freedom and independence and that his example could be followed by other Asian peoples. The interview sparked a storm of controversy, especially in England, so much so that Gayda had to confirm its authenticity on December 19. Gandhi, whose real position at the conclusion of the London negotiations had not been at all clear, so that many had understood it to be oriented toward a resumption of the struggle, did not want or know how to deny it in a clear and convincing manner. Based on the available documentation, it is impossible to say whether the statements reported by Gayda were true or had been falsified or manipulated, as many claimed. Two facts remain, however: that the situation in some Indian regions had worsened in the meantime and that the British had adopted severe repressive measures a few days after his return to India on January 3, 1932, Gandhi resumed the struggle; and that on the Italian side, interest in Gandhi, after the flare-up and controversy of 1931, diminished considerably, and with it sympathy for him; certainly in the media, but if ever there had been any, also in politics. Various reasons must have contributed to this decline in interest, including Gandhi's unreliability, from an Italian and fascist point of view, and the growing conviction that, however sensational and effective it might be, the 'non-violent' struggle he had theorized and practiced, on the one hand, would not yield quick results and, on the other, was too far removed from the philosophy and lifestyle of fascism for the latter to even indirectly endorse it. This was at a time when, with Gandhi removed from Palazzo Chigi, Mussolini was tending to assert a new, more autonomous and dynamic way for Italy to do politics and, in this logic for the East and therefore, at least in perspective, also for India, albeit to a lesser extent than other Eastern countries that were closer and had even less clear ideas, new tactics were being adopted, as we have already mentioned, which were more open to less traditional methods and contacts that had not been considered until then. As far as India was concerned, there were three main tactics. One was that of the Confederation of Oriental Students, in which Indians, organized in the Federation of Indian and Ceylonese Students Abroad, had considerable influence, so much so that the Federation's secretary general, D. N. Dubash, was deputy secretary of the Confederation. In the early days, in 1933-34, this approach seemed to be bearing fruit. However, the Italian-German crisis caused by the failed push in Vienna dealt it a first serious blow. The conflict between Rome and Berlin had immediate repercussions

within the Federation: Italy's influence on it had been less shaken than that of Germany (already compromised by the discrimination to which Indian students were exposed in German universities); but the struggle between their respective supporters had strengthened above all the positions closest to a democratically inspired anti-imperialism or those that were less politically committed. A second and more serious blow was then dealt to it, first by the crisis and then by the Italian-Ethiopian conflict, as the sympathy and solidarity of many Indian students went to Ethiopia, partly because of the strong pacifism that characterized their political attitude, and partly because they sawthey saw Italy's aggression against Ethiopia as a manifestation of imperialism and Mussolini's 'civilizing mission' as a racist mentality. A few years ago, G. Procacci discussed the repercussions of the Ethiopian war in India and the reactions it provoked in the Indian nationalist movement, so there is no need to dwell on them here. For the purposes of reconstructing the regime's 'Indian policy', suffice it to say that, while the vast majority of the nationalist movement had taken a position in favor ofEthiopia, at first (before the start of military operations) there had been no lack of uncertainty and ambiguity (even on the part of Gandhi), at least as it appeared to Rome, which was easy to understand given the role that England played in the whole Ethiopian affair, and that even after the start of hostilities, this uncertainty and ambiguity had manifested itself in prestigious leaders such as Chandra Bose and in important political formations, such as the Gadar Party, positions in favor of Italy or, in any case, for non-commitment alongside England. This was not only and not so much because of a sort of psychological refusal to be on the same side of the barricade as the English "rulers," but rather because of thoughts about the future of India; about a future European conflict (of which the Italian-Ethiopian one was seen as a precursor) in which England would certainly have wanted to drag the Indians along in the name of democracy and anti-fascism, while India's independence could only be achieved if the British were defeated. It was in this context that the second of the three paths along which Italian policy of 'attention' towards India had moved in the 1930s took shape. Fromthe beginning, the goal that Rome had sought to achieve was rather limited and closely linked to the moment: to establish contacts that could promote a "neutral or indirectly favorable" orientation towards Italy in the Indian press and therefore in Indian public opinion with regard to the Ethiopian affair. To this end, on the suggestion of Enderle in Rome and the consul in Bombay, E. Pagliano, Palazzo Chigi had been considering since September 1935 to make contact with Nehru who, after Gandhi's temporary withdrawal from active politics, was "the virtual leader of the nationalist movement" and whose stance in one direction or another could have had "a decisive effect." Despite the care with which it had been prepared,Nehru operation ended in failure. The Indian leader, who had been informed during a stay in the Black Forest and then in Lausanne to assist his seriously ill wife that Mussolini would be happy to meet him privately when he passed through Rome on his way back, declined the invitation. With the possibility of engaging Nehru in some way now gone, thePalazzo Chigi's attention focused not only on Bose, as we shall see shortly, but also on Shedai and the Gadar Party, whose uncompromising anti-British stance offered greater guarantees of success and which, moreover, had just at that time renewed its requests for Rome to support its struggle, especially now that, due to pressure from London on Moscow, relations with the

Comintern had entered a phase of coldness. The immediate results of the collaboration that had been established 1 See G. Procacci, Dalla parte dell'Etiopia, pp. 50 ff., 54 ff. and esp. 60 ff.; as well as J. Nehru, Autobiography, pp. 617 ff., where, among other things, we read: "Despite my strong disapproval of the fascist regime, I would normally have liked to meet Mr. Mussolini and see for myself what kind of man he wasman who played such an important role in world affairs. But at that time [referring to the death of his wife a few days earlier], I did not feel up to holding talks. What discouraged me even more was the continuation of the campaign in Abyssinia and my fear that such a meeting would end up being exploited for fascist propaganda purposes. No denial on my part would have gone very far." In anticipationthe meeting at Palazzo Chigi on March 7, 1936, he prepared a memo ("Some points that may be useful to keep in mind during the meeting with Nehru") divided into several sections: Nehru's political career and ideological position, his attitude toward fascism ("Regarding fascism, Nehru seems to have very vague ideas and to have gone through different attitudes"), India's main problems at that time, and Italian-Indian problems." Regarding the latter, it reads: "Regarding Italian-Indian problems, it should be remembered thatIndia on the Ethiopian question has so far been, in general, predominantly hostile and full of misunderstandings. The Indian press carries the most implausible and fantastic news about Italian defeats, Italian atrocities, etc. A clear change has already taken place in the newspapers influenced by Bose, and particularly in the Fotvard in Calcutta. Nehru's influence on the rest of the Indian press is incalculable, so his taking a position, whether neutral or indirectly favorable to us, would have a decisive effect. This could be the most immediate benefit of the meeting. Subsequently, we could consider coordinating anti-British action, and from this point of view, given the rigid organization that exists in the Indian nationalist movement, only by dealing with the leaders responsible can lasting effects be achieved; that there is still little understanding in India of Italy's mediating role between East and West, in accordance with its centuries-old traditions in this field. There is still a certain mistrust of the activities of the Confederation of Eastern Students, promoted by the Duce, which is one aspect of this mediation; that the trade balance between India and Italy before the sanctions was favorable to India. Why lose this advantage? Indian products are easily replaceable (the main Indian exports to Italy are: jute, oilseeds, cotton waste, solid paraffin, leather, etc.). This is an aspect that India cannot overlook' (asmae, Coordination Office, se. II, phase. 'Nehru'). In the aforementioned 'Brief History' of the Gadar Party, written for Palazzo Chigi in 1937 by I. Shedai, he explained his party's 'turnaround' and his own role in it: 'From 1926, relations between the Gadar Party and the USSR government became excellent, but in 1935 , during his visit to Moscow, Mr. Eden informed Litvinoff that Anglo-Russian cooperation would never be possible as long as the Gadar Party was aided and encouraged by the Comintern. The Russian government, which had tested the strength of our party during the events in China, hesitated to break completely with us, but in any case began to show considerable coldness in its relations with Gadar Party. For my part, had been pointing out to my party's Central Committee for years that we could not rely entirely on the help of the USSR government. I was also able to demonstrate that the USSR government was exploiting us to achieve its hidden goals. I was thus ordered to establish friendly relations with leading members of the Italian government, following my

efforts to convince my leaders that Italy and England were inevitably destined to becomeenemies without any possibility of reconciliation. I presented my superiors with all the arguments necessary to convince them of this fact, arguments that I also presented to my Italian friends in numerous memos. I would add that I have always believed, and continue to believe, that only Italy can be India's natural ally... Russia, due to its geographical position, is too dangerous a neighbor for our country! » between Shedai and Palazzo Chigi were notbeyond the echoes that the Gadar Party'sthe Gadar Party had sent several thousand posters and circulars to India inviting Indian troops to refuse "to leave India to fight" and to "declare themselves ready only to fight for the direct defense of Indian territory."1 Although Italy had avoided establishing binding relations with the Gadar Party (in May 1937, in response to yet another request to that effect, Ciano replied that he "did not consider it possible at that time to take into consideration the possibility of fruitful contacts"), he did not rule out that "such an opportunity" might arise.yet another request to this effect, Ciano replied that he "did not consider it possible at the moment to take into consideration the possibility of fruitful contacts," although he did not rule out that "such an opportunity" might arise "in the future."2) Contacts with Shedai became closer after the war in Ethiopia. Although his activism sometimes caused concern and he repeatedly stated that he would never be "the agent of a foreign country," but that, like his party, he worked "only for the interests of India and its friends, whoever they may be," and that if he pinned his hopes on Italy, it was because he was convinced that Rome and London were now irreconcilable enemies and that only the military defeat ofEngland would lead India to full independence, his relations with many of the leading Indian and non-Indian figures, especially Muslims, of the anti-British Asian nationalist movements could not be underestimated, especially when, in 1938, the Germans also showed interest in him and Rome began to fear that they wanted to compete with Italy in the field of an "Indian policy" that did not actually exist, but in which he did not want Berlin to precede him. Hence the interest of Palazzo Chigi in trying to penetrate, thanks to Shedai, the intentions of the Wilhelmstrasse and' policy' that did not actually exist, but in which it did not want Berlin to precede it. Hence the interest of Palazzo Chigi in trying to penetrate, thanks to Shedai, the intentions of the Wilhelmstrasse and possibly counter them, essentially playing on the asmae, Coordination Office, se. II, phase. 'Gadar Party'. See ibid., 'Note for His Excellency the Minister', dated May 27, 1937. The Gadar Party had made it known that it wanted: "1) limited financial aid; facilities for the transfer of its own funds from the American Central Office to India; facilities for sending orders, news, etc. to India; the provision of some instructors for elements intended for direct action (use of explosives, application of devices, etc.)". The offices of Palazzo Chigi did not oppose these requests. Ciano was asked to give a "generally favorable" response, especially with regard to points 2, 3, and even 4, and to examine in greater detailthe amount of financial aid requested in point 1. In a note dated May 14, 1937, I. Shedai stated that he was convinced that, by using his relations with a whole series of Nehru's collaborators, advisers, and family members "with prudence and tact," it would be possible, in the event of a conflict, to win the Indian leader over to Italy's cause: "He is currently under the influence of socialist ideas, but we are sure that we can get him to join an anti-British action for the liberation of India from British rule" (asmae,

Coordination Office, se. II, phase. "Palestine"). Between the end of August and the beginning of September 1938, I. Shedai was in Berlin, where he held talks with senior officials from the Foreign and Propaganda Ministries, to whom he had been introduced by the former president of the distrust and hostility of Indians towards National Socialist racism and Hitler's theory of Anglo-German friendship, and, at the same time, to expand the number of his contacts with Indian nationalists or those connected to them, beyond those he had had until then thanks to ISMEO and some Orientalists such as Carlo Formichi and Giuseppe Tucci. The third tactical line along which the policy of "attention" to India had moved and which, in a certain sense, would prove to be the most consistent and lasting, was that of contacts with Subhas Chandra Bose, the third, along with Gandhi and Nehru, of the major leaders of the movement for the Afghan Council Gulam Siddik Khan. He made a detailed written report of these talks in Rome, enclosing a copy of a memorandum, drawn up at the German request, relating to his point of view on German policy in the East since the First World War , the situation in Turkey, the Arab countries, Afghanistan, and India, and the activities that, in his opinion, Berlin should have carried out in those countries. As in a series of documents addressed to Rome the following year, Shedai tried to convince the Germans that an agreement between the Axis and England was impossible and that, since conflict was inevitable, it was better to hasten it in order to prevent the British. In this context, India was the crux of the situation. As Shedai wrote to Enderle in February 1939: "The most serious blow can be dealt to England in India. It is a fact that as long as India remains in British hands, they will be strong in the world. They can bring millions of Indian fighters to die on the battlefields against Italy, Germany, and even Japan. At present, British propaganda is very successful because many Indian leaders are persuaded by it that Italy, Germany, and Japan are threats to the world. All this propaganda is conducted in the name of democracy. England wants India to save democracy. Even Jawaharlal Nehru has been convinced by this propaganda. He has promised to save British democracy (i.e., Judaism). We have already reported several times that India will send about 500,000 soldiers in the event of war in the Near East and Kenya, etc., to protect the interests of British democracy! (cf. asmae, Gabinetto, Italia, b. 5, fase. 407). In March 1939, a meeting took place in Switzerland, organized by Shedai, between R. Bova Scoppa and two Indian Muslim leaders, Chandri Khaliq uz Zaman, secretary of the All Indian Muslim League, and the Bengali deputy Rahman Siddiqui (who had already had dealings with A. Mussolini). The two were in Rome in early April, where Bova Scoppa and Enderle wanted them to be received by Ciano. However, we have not been able to establish whether he saw them (see asmae, Gabinetto, Italia, b. 5, fase. 407). For the sake of brevity, we will mention only those from 1935 onwards, with Monindra Mohan Moulik, former secretary of the Indian Press Association of Calcutta, who graduated in political science in Rome with A.For the sake of brevity, we will only mention those from 1935 onwards, with Monindra Mohan Moulik, former secretary of the Indian Press Association of Calcutta, who graduated in political science in Rome with A. De Stefani, was a scholarship holder at ISMEO, contributor to various Italian periodicals (in which he publicized and promoted the positions of Indian nationalism most favorable to Italy), and correspondent for several Indian newspapers. See Ferretti, Politica e cultura: origini e attività dell'iSMEO durante il regime fascista cit., pp. 797 and 803 ff. The role of

ISMEO in Italian fascist policy towards India has yet to be adequately explored. Ferretti's essay made an important initial contribution in this regard, but the investigation deserves to be developed further. As Ferretti observed (p. 793), ISMEO was the conduit for many links with Asian liberation movementsand contributed to the formation of an 'ideology ofsupport' for them. Its creation and activities depended largely on the will and support (including financial) of Mussolini. There were many conflicts surrounding its direction, not only between those who conceived its activities primarily from a cultural perspective and those who tended to use it as a vehicle for more strictly political activities, but also among the latter. Far from simple were, for example, its relations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, especially after Ciano took over and had to try to curb the more openly pro-Japanese and pro-Asian and Indian liberation movements tendencies, towards which Mussolini's sympathies were increasingly clear. The relations between ISMEO and the armed forces, and in particular with the Navy, which was always present in its governing bodies with its own influential representatives. A careful reading of the magazine Asiatica sometimes reveals some of these internal conflicts, just as a comparison between its basic line and that of Relazioni Internazionali allows us to see in more than one case how Mussolini's position differed from that of Ciano. Indian national independence and, at the same time, the most unscrupulous and radical among them, an advocate of 'a synthesis between fascism and communism', which he considered particularly congenial to India. Based on the available documentation, the first contacts with Bose must be placed in the context of the initiatives connected with the Confederation of Oriental Students and its first congress at the end of 1933 (in which one of his supporters, A. N. Sarkar), in which one of his supporters, A. N. Sarkar, played a prominent role. Bose did not participate personally, even though he was in Europe to be treated for an illness contracted in prison (for which he had been released by the British) and to establish contacts both with groups of young Indians who were there (especially in France, Austria, Germany, and Italy) and with intellectuals and politicians whom he considered most sensitive to the cause of Indian independence.Indian independence. In Rome, on December 28, Bose was received by Starace, who had a "very favorable" impression of him, and gave an interview to the Giornale d'Italia. After that, on January 6, 1934, he was also received by Mussolini. From Rome, he then went to Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Austria, from where he returned to Rome. Receivedby the Duce a second time on April 28, he resumed his travels across the continent, but had to interrupt them abruptly in November, as his father was dying. Passing through Rome on his way back to India, he wanted to be received once more by Mussolini; as this was not possible, he left him a letter which, in the absence of any documentation on the meetings in January and April, is the only element that gives us an idea and, in particular, leads us to believe that, while showing sympathy for India and Bose's position, Mussolini did not go very far far. Two months later, Bose was back in Europe. In Rome, on January 25, he was received by the "Duce" and presented at Palazzo Chigi "his program to found an international league with the aim of close cooperation between nationalist parties and oppressed peoples in order to spark a simultaneous revolutionary movement when the time was right." He also spoke of the contacts he had already made with the Arabs for this purpose with the Arabs, particularly with el-Giabri. In the following months, the first signs of preparations for the

war in Ethiopia had increased Italian interest in Bose, even though Shedai, either because he was misinformed, for reasons of political competition, or because, like many, he considered him an agent of Moscow, had tried to cast him in a bad light by asserting that between Italy andEthiopia, as an Oriental, he must feel a moral duty to support the cause of the latter, even if this helped British imperialism. In fact, in the second half of 1935 and in the early months of 1936, Bose had worked prudently but intelligently to steer the Indian press close to him, and in particular the Calcutta-based Forward, in a pro-Italian direction. This is confirmed by the fact that his fourth meeting with Mussolini, on March 27, 1936, took place more at the insistence of the Italians than at his own request. In January 1938, Bose was received by Ciano (who had not

503 No sympathy or esteem for the Indians: "In my opinion, and based on my brief visits to India, I think they are a dull and unresponsive people, who will not gain independence until other forces bring down Great Britain. And perhaps even then some new master will install himself in India"1), whose only suggestion was to direct Indian sympathies towards Italy and Japan: "the two countries that have most deeply undermined British prestige"2. In the following months, Bose was elected president of the Congress Party, succeeding Nehru, and was confirmed in this position in early 1939, despite opposition from Gandhi and Nehru's followers, who opposed both his industrialization programs and the propaganda campaign he had launched after Munich to "prepare the Indian people for a national struggle that was to be synchronized with the impending European war."3. Nevertheless, his relations with Rome had not made any new progress. As with the Arab nationalist movements and, for India, with the Gadar Party, even with Bose, in fact, on the Italian side, as long as there was hope of reaching an agreement with the British, he had expressed to one of his trustees his desire to meet with V. E. if the pretext were provided by the need to embark in Italy. This possibility is no longer compatible with his movements. However, it is considered useful and appropriate to make contact with Bose before his departure for India, either by sending one of our confidants to Paris or by inviting Bose to make a quick trip to Italy. Before telephoning Bose, in a completely confidential and prudent manner, to ask about the possibility of this trip to Italy, it would be necessary to know whether Your Excellency, if so, would like to meet with him. Bose, together with Jawaharlal Nehru, is being considered for the position of President of the Lucknow Congress. Although Nehru is the most likely candidate, Bose's influence in India remains enormous. The Indian Congress celebrated its first 50th anniversary in 1935. The next meeting will mark the beginning of the first year of the second 50 years, a year which, as far as we know, will be characterized by a violent resurgence of nationalist activity in a more decidedly anti-British sense. It should be noted that April will mark the beginning of this resurgence. Two circumstances are driving Indian nationalists to action: the British crisis over the Ethiopian question and the imposition of the new India Act, which satisfies no one. From the Italian point of view, Bose, unlike other Indian leaders, has shown himself to be clearly in favor of our position and has contributed, among other things, to changing the anti-Italian tone of the well-known Calcutta daily newspaper, the "Forvard." This latter circumstance is clearly evident from a letter in our

possession from the editor of the Forward to Bose himself, in which he states: "I fully appreciate your attitude towards the Abyssinian question and I hope you have noticed a change in the Forward's articles on the subject." The Forward has indeed changed its tone. See G. Ciano, Diario cit., p. 89 (January 20, 1938). Ibid. A note for Ciano dated January 26, 1938, shows that Bose met with the secretary of the Japanese embassy, Teresaki, in Rome and reassured him of his pro-Japanese sentiments "in the event that, for tactical reasons and in order not to go against the tide at a time when his appointment as president of the Indian Congress was at stake, he had to express himself publicly in terms that were not favorable to the Japanese enterprise in China." See S. C. Bose, La lotta dell'India (The Struggle of India), pp. 312 ff. In April 1939, his opponents rejected his proposal to force the British, by means of an ultimatum, to choose between granting India independence within six months and facing the outbreak of a mass national struggle to achieve it by force. Bose resigned as president of the Congress Party and founded his own radical and progressive party, better known as the Forward Bloc, in opposition to the party that remained in the hands of Gandhi and Nehru. land and, again, until the outbreak of war in June 1940, he had avoided entering into truly demanding relationships, contenting himself with the modest benefits that could be acquired from time to time and, above all, with being 'present' in the game, so as to use this 'presence' (which was, moreover, less costly and compromising than that in the Arab field) as a deterrent, as a means of exerting pressure on the British and, if necessary, as a bargaining chip in the event of an agreement with them. As we have already said, one thing is certain: until June 1940, neither Ciano nor Mussolini himself, who was much more sensitive to the Indian question than his son-in-law, had any clear ideas about how to develop relations with Indian nationalists and did nothing that might risk complications with London. Things began to change very slowly only after Italy entered the war and, compared to the 'Arab policy', with much less conviction (especially on Ciano's part) and much less clear ideas (especially in Rome, because those who followed the Indian situation more closely, from Bangkok and especially from Kabul, did not lack suggestions and ideas, but Palazzo Chigi either did not take them up or studied them for so long that they often became unworkable). Suffice it to say that the establishment of an "India Office" at the Foreign Ministry and the organization of a regular radio broadcast service to India (entrusted to Shedai) would only come about in December 1941 and that, around this time, were three factors that were either external to it or in which Rome had played a secondary role. The first of these was the arrival in Germany of Chandra Bose in early April 1941. The Indian nationalist leader had secretly reached Kabul, taken refuge at the Italian legation, and, thanks in particular to the initiative of the mi-

505 Minister P. Quaroni had managed to travel to Europe via the Soviet Union. In Berlin, he immediately established contact with the Germans, so much so that he only came to Rome two months later, when he realized that Berlin was not in the least willing to support his request to the Axis for India's independence with a public, solemn declaration, in order to try to obtain Italian help. The second fact, more important 'because Ciano had no intention of getting into yet another clash with Berlin solely for the cause of Indian independence and

would probably have managed to restrain Mussolini if he had thought of supporting it, and it is not certain that he would have done so at that particular moment', was the new phase that Italian 'Arab policy' had entered, as mentioned in the previous chapter, after the arrival in Europe, between October and November, of the Mufti and el Gaylani and their insistence that the Axis powers proceed with the publication of theArab policy' after the arrival in Europe, between October and November, of the Mufti and el Gaylani and their insistence that the Axis powers publish an explicit declaration in favor of Arab independence. The third and, ultimately, decisive factor was Japan's entry into the war, which madeIndia a political and strategic reality that was no longer distant and largely hypothetical, but alive and current, and in which Rome could seek to insert itself with more arrows in its quiver, even if there were certainly those, such as Pirelli, who, unable to resign themselves to the idea that Japan had a free hand in India, showed understanding for Berlin's "reservations" and Berlin's maneuvers regarding Indian policy and would therefore have preferred Mussolini not to engage in initiatives that would ultimately only benefit the Japanese. The absence of clear ideas that had characterized Italian policy toward India until that moment, and thus for almost a year and a half, had marked Italian policy towards India, putting it practically in tow to that of Germany, and Ciano's personal psychological and political attitude on the matter are clearly indicated by how the son-in-law of the 'Duce' recorded in his diary the meeting he had on June 6, 1941, with Bose, when the latter came to Rome for the first time after his escape from India: Ricevo Bose, leader of the Indian insurrectional movement. He would like the Axis to make a declaration for the independence of India, but his proposals have been received with great caution in Berlin. It is not in our interest to compromise ourselves too much, especially since it is unclear how much credit can be given to this young man. Past experiences have yielded rather modest results. This explains why, a few days later, at the meeting in Venice on June 15, Ciano readily accepted von Ribbentrop's view that, while it was appropriate to "help Bose in his propaganda work by providing him with the necessary means," it was "premature for the Axis to make any public statement regarding the future settlement of India," so much so that, "precisely to avoid any particular compromise in this regard," Hitler had not even wanted to receive Bose. This explains why, eight days later, in Berlin, where Pavolini had gone to coordinate with Goebbels their respective propaganda efforts abroad, the Italian side had agreed that the point concerning India should be formulated in these terms: The Indian independence movement is being promoted. However, interference in Indian internal affairs or any discussion of the future fate of India must be avoidedIndia. It must be continually emphasized that this is an internal Indian matter. And this despite the fact that the Foreign Ministry had officials such as Gino Scarpa (who had been dealing with Indian issues for more than a decade, including in the press under the pseudonym Viator, and had all kinds of contacts and relationships in the country) and Camillo Giuriati, who knew the Indian situation well and how to fit into it; not to mention Iqbal Shedai, who had been in Rome since early 1941, but even though he occasionally held radio conversations in Hindi, he was used more as an expert on Muslim issues in general and Arab issues in particular than on Indian issues. According to Chandra Bose, when Italy entered the war, the internal situation in India was extremely precarious for the British, so that when Graziani's troops went on

the offensive in North Africa, not only did the nationalists expect to 'see them arrive here', but if the offensive had not been immediately halted, they were ready to move. It is impossible to say how realistic these statements were. However, it is a fact that Quaroni, from his "window" in Kabul, on March 27, 1941, informing Rome of what Bose, upon arriving in Europe, wanted to ask the Axis governments, expressed himself in more cautious but substantially similar terms about the internal situation in India: Bose's program is as follows: Constitution of a free Indian government similar to the free governments gathered in London, conclusion of a treaty between the free Indian government and Italy, Germany, and Japan, whereby these powers undertake to recognize India's full independence. Aid from us in the form of loans to foment revolution in India. Bose attaches great importance to radio propaganda. A necessary prerequisite for revolution in India is to persuade Indians that England will lose the war; therefore, he will request permission to create special Free India broadcasts. What he will report to you about the internal situation in India is confirmed in the general lines of the censored Indian newspapers. I cannot venture to give an opinion on the general situation in India; however, it is my impression that if we had been organized to work in India last June work in India, it might have been possible to precipitate the situation. Since a similar situation may arise again this year, it may be appropriate to prepare now for action to take advantage of the opportunity. At the technical level, among experts, Quaroni's "impression" must also have had some effect, especially since it coincided with an event in those same weeks that could lead one to think, or at least, give hope that the opportunity missed the previous year might soon arise again. We refer to the British government's decision to massively expand the recruitment of Indians and their use against the Axis. This decision, while foreshadowing a significant worsening of Italy's military situation, also increased the possibilities of leveraging the widespread discontent and hostility that it and the endorsement given to it by the leading 'moderate' Indian politicians' had aroused in large sections of the country and in entire regions. We see no other way of interpreting a 'Working Plan for India' (undated, but certainly from April 1941) drawn up at Palazzo Chigi. Although it was never followed up, it is of great interest to us because it shows that, at a technical level, among experts, the Indian problem was well known to the Foreign Ministry and there was no shortage of ideas and, more importantly, precise proposals on how to address it, while what was lacking was the political will of Ciano and his closest collaborators. The only mitigating factor for Ciano's deafness and passivity, limited to his underestimation of Bose's personality and effective political weight and the political and operational demands he advocated, is that the Bengali nationalist leader did not enjoy Shedai's sympathy (and, perhaps, was also viewed with some suspicion by Enderle): probably partly for trivial reasons of personal rivalry, and partly because one was Hindu and the other Muslim. So when Bose was in Rome at the end of May and beginning of June 1941, Shedai, who had had numerous meetings with him, not only refused to cooperate with him and the Gadar Party, but also gave Lanza d'Ajeta, Ciano's deputy chief of staff, a series of entirely negative assessments. In essence, according to Shedai, Bose was nothing more than an agitator, without his own revolutionary party and with only a few followers in Bengal; all the Indian parties were against him and Gandhi hated him; using him would therefore be counterproductive; at most, he could be used secretly, which ruled

out accepting his proposal to establish an Indian government abroad under his leadership; finally, it should be to bear in mind that Bose had essentially aimed to secure the support of the Germans and that if he was now turning to Rome, it was because his proposals had not been accepted by Berlin and he was hoping for Mussolini's good offices to be received by Hitler, who until then had not wanted to meet him and had not taken him seriously (which was tantamount to indirectly suggesting to'Ajeta, i.e. Ciano, to prevent him from being received by the 'Duce'). At the end of the year, however, with Japan's entry into the war, Shedai's position underwent a significant change. During a meeting convened in Berlin in December by the Germans to take stock of 'issues concerning India and the Middle East' (the two problems were now increasingly becoming one and the same, and even more so thewould become even more so the following month, when Bose and the Mufti established, as we have already mentioned, operational contact between them and approached Oshima to obtain Japanese support) and which was also attended by Bose, Shedai, and the Afghan Gulam Siddq Khan, the two Indian nationalists supported practically the same arguments. In particular, that theif the Axis wanted to counter British propaganda, which claimed that Berlin and Rome wanted to 'liberate' India from the British 'in order to subjugate it themselves in an even harsher manner', and to gain the support of the masses and the 'patriots' , it had to make "an official, public, and solemn declaration... affirming its precise intention to make India a free and independent state tomorrow." They supported these arguments with such vigor that the Germans had to acknowledge their validity and commit to raising the issue with Hitler. As deputy director general of Transoceanic Affairs and head of the "Asia Office" at Palazzo Chigi, Adolfo Alessandrini, who led the Italian delegation, emphasized in his report on the meeting's proceedings, drafted on December 31, that both Bose and Shedai were motivated in their request by "a particular and keen concern regarding Japan's intentions towards India" and by the desire to be able to use the Axis declaration "as a guarantee towards Japan." However, what brought Shedai into line with Bose's position was above all the new prospect of the Japanese army soon appearing on the borders ofand the need they felt, therefore, to prioritize this over any other issue, to activate all anti-British tendencies and forces and to present themselves to both their compatriots and the Japanese as united as possible. On the Italian side, however, the political value of this alignment was not grasped, so much so that in the concluding part of his report, Alessandrini dwelled on some very critical considerations about Bose, which were essentially based on what Shedai had written to d'Ajeta in early June. Similarly, it does not seem that the value of Shedai's interest in the creation of an Indian legion, to be recruited from among prisoners of war and deployed on the Caucasian front, was grasped in order to understand the future intentions of the Germans. Thus, in Berlin, Alessandrini adapted to the in order to understand the future intentions of the Germans, namely their interest in creating an Indian legion to be recruited from among prisoners of war and deployed on the Caucasian front. Thus, in Berlin, Alessandrini slavishly conformed to the German positions, first on theinappropriateness of proceeding with the public declaration requested by the Indians until the Axis was certain that it could keep its commitment and 'bring effective help' to the Indians; then, after the vigorous counter-arguments of Bose and Shedai, to that of resubmitting the whole question to the Führer, almost certainly convinced, however, that

Hitler would not change his mind, for otherwise it is difficult to explain his proposal (a sort of of appeasement to prevent the Indians from leaving the meeting completely disappointed) that "pending a possible review of the matter and new higher decisions," an attempt should be made to remedy "the obvious drawbacks of the current silence of the Axis powers regarding India" by instructing the German and Italian press and radio 'to try to give the impression of a sincere interest on the part of the Axis in Indian independence', so as to counter 'the increased British propaganda'. The Palazzo Chigi also initially took this essentially passive line, considering thatIndia continued to be a problem of such little interest that it was not worth coming into conflict with Germany and running the risk of missteps with Japan. In reality, if Berlin (which, as Göring told Mussolini during their meeting on January 28, believed that the Japanese would "threaten" India and would push their navy as far as the Persian Gulf) wanted to keep its hands completely free in anticipation of the possibilities that would open up when the Wehrmacht crossed the Caucasus mountain range and was therefore opposed to any public statement committing it to recognizing and supporting Indian independence (as well as Arab independence), Tokyo was more willing in both cases. Although, as we have already said, the Japanese thought of India not so much as a fully independent country but as a sort of conditional independence that the Indians had to earn through their "patriotism," that is, by taking a decisive stand against the British, at that moment the Japanese were in fact interested above all in strengthening all centrifugal tendencies in India, to push the Congress Party towards more decidedly anti-British positions and to encourage and support any initiative that could exert an influence in this direction. From this perspective, the establishment of a government in exile of 'Free India', led by a highly prestigious leader such as Chandra Bose and endorsed by a tripartite declaration in favor ofIndian independence was of extreme importance to them, as was that for Arab independence, given the difficulties it would create for the British right behind India and the influence it would have on the attitude of Indian Muslims. This was at a time when the two national movements were in the process of rapprochement and, despite their mistrust and concerns about Japan's actual intentions, were showing a willingness to turn to Tokyo to intervene with Hitler and persuade him to withdraw his opposition to any 'untimely' declaration of independence. What prompted Ciano and the leaders at Palazzo Chigi to seriously consider (albeit, all things considered, at least on Ciano's part with a certain reluctance and underlying skepticism) the Indian card was a series of events that are worth highlighting. First of all, the "long" war ' 511 to the fact that the link between the question of Indian independence and that of Arab independence (which, on the contrary, Palazzo Chigi felt strongly and was now determined to address even in contradiction with the Germans) was becoming ever closer and also involved Japan, thus opening up new room for maneuver for Italian politics. Secondly, what, April 1942, the preparation of the Italian-German offensive in Egypt and the German offensive in the Caucasus took on such importance in the Axis strategy that, as far as Rome was concerned, it resulted not only in a resumption of initiative vis-à-vis the Germans on the issue of Arab policy, but also in a greater commitment to seeking the privileged relationship with Tokyo that Mussolini had been pursuing since Japan entered the war, but which he had not yet managed to achieve. Finally, in that context, Mussolini had to get personally involved,

overcoming Ciano's reluctance and passive resistance to get involved in an issue such as India, which he continued to consider of little significance, largely due to his father-in-law's Japanophilia, and which was viewed by Berlin in a different light from that of the Japanese and Mussolini. The progression of events in this regard is significant. In January, after contacts between Bose and the Mufti and after they had met in Berlin with Oshima, the latter, as we have already mentioned, had expressed to Hitler his "personal" opinion that there was no reason to delay any longer in issuing a tripartite declaration on the independence of the Arab countries and India. In March, faced with Berlin's silence, the Japanese ambassador raised the issue with Alfieri, emphasizing that "the extremely favorable development of military operations in Burma" and the conquest of Rangoon made the moment particularly propitious for the release of the two declarations. He also mentioned the opportunity for the Tripartite to make "a kind of appeal for the liberation from British rule of all peoples subjugated to London." Perhaps sincerely, perhaps to push Rome towards a more combative stance, he added that he considered the solution that Berlin seemed to view less unfavorably to be wrong, namely that of not proceeding with the simultaneous release of the two declarations, but limiting themselves, at least for the moment, to the one relating to India: this, in fact, could have given rise to dangerous suspicions among the Arabs. After these two démarches by Oshima, Tokyo, which, with the Cripps mission to India having essentially failed, had every interest in striking while the iron was hot, had also transmitted – as we have already mentioned – on April 13, to Berlin, S. IX, Vili, pp. 391 Sg. no and Rome a draft declaration on India and 'Arabia', undoubtedly very generic, so that it would not, it was to be hoped, be too difficult for Hitler to accept, but which, if accepted, would nevertheless have represented a significant step forward for the whole issue. Contrary to the hopes of the Japanese, however, Berlin, while saying that it was not hostile to the idea in principle but had some comments to make on the text submitted to it, took its time, saying that it could not give an immediate answer, and at the same time fell back on the line of cutting off, so to speak, the legs of thethe Japanese initiative by informing Rome that it agreed to proceed with the exchange of secret letters with the Mufti and el Gaylani concerning the independence of the Arab countries. With this move, as we have already mentioned in the previous chapter, the German government achieved four results: it reassured its military, for whom what mattered was to be able to benefit from the cooperation of the Muslim populations in Africa, Russia, and Yugoslavia; it averted the risk of negative reactions that a new refusal could have provoked on the part of the Mufti and el Gaylani; it avoided straining relations with the Italians, who were unwilling to give up recognition of the independence of the Arabs of the Near and Middle East and were increasingly clear that they were ready to join forces with the Japanese to achieve this; and, finally, put the latter in a position to either resolve the issue of Indian independence in the same way or, more likely, that a secret commitment was of no use to them and, moreover, tied their hands, committing them to the future without any compensation, to give up the idea of a public declaration by the three parties. Unwelcome in Berlin and viewed unfavorably by Ciano, the Japanese proposal had, on the contrary, immediately met with Mussolini's approval. On April 14, Ciano noted in this regard: The Japanese are proposing a Tripartite declaration for the independence of India and Arabia. Berlin's initial reactions are

unfavorable; the Japanese initiative in areas increasingly close to Europe is not welcome. Mussolini, on the other hand, would certainly like to agree to the proposal. And ten days later, informed by his son-in-law that Shimizu had vented his frustration to the new director general of Transoceanic Affairs, Renato Prunas, about the attitude of the Germans and their "completely wrong" way of conducting the war "in the political sector," he had expressed a very favorable comment. If we keep these precedents in mind, we can understand why, when he met with Hitler in Salzburg on April 29 and 30, Mussolini raised the issue of both Arab and Indian independence and the related Japanese proposal. Based on the available documentation, the most accurate information on this subject can be gleaned from Mussolini's own report on his talks with Hitler. It reads as follows: Regarding a declaration requested by Tokyo on the independence of India and the Arab countries, it is agreed that such a declaration may be made by Japan, which borders India, and the Axis agrees to this; while for the Arab countries, 'until we are south of the Caucasus', such a declaration would be premature and purely platonic and, according to Ribbentrop, 'could be exploited by extremist British propaganda'. From this evidence, we can deduce that Hitler, while unyielding on the declaration concerning the independence of the Arab countries, he had to accept, at least formally, the principle that if the Japanese decided to go it alone and not extend it to the Arab countries, the Axis could not ignore it and would give its approval. It is more difficult to determine whether Mussolini (who, according to Ciano, returned from Salzburg pleased with his talks with Hitler) accepted this decision or realized that, put in those terms, it had only a platonic value, so that Tokyo would end up renouncing the declaration. The only thing that is certain is that in the days that immediately followed, while Ciano hastened to tell Bose that the declaration in favor of Indian independence was "postponed indefinitely" and did not take Bose's arguments in accepting and criticizing the communication very seriously,1 Mussolini, on the other hand, had a long conversation with him on May 5, agreed with them, and instructed Alfieri to raise the issue again in Berlin.2 Although convinced that Hitler would be very unlikely to agree to reverse the decision taken a few days earlier in Salzburg, Ciano had no choice but to obey. In the middle of the night between May 5 and 6, he sent this telegram to Alfieri from Rome: The Duce received Bose this morning and discussed with him the situation in India, especially with regard to the recent Japanese plan for a joint declaration by the three Tripartite Powers concerning India and Arabia. g. ciano, Diary, p. 617 (May 4, 1942): "I receive Bose, leader of the Indian nationalists. He is disappointed to learn that the declaration of Indian independence has been postponed indefinitely. He believes that this plays into the hands of Japan, which will act on its own behalf, without taking into account the interests of the Axis. He now believes that British rule in India is coming to an end: the metropolitan army has few forces and the Indian army has no desire to fight. Of course, these statements by Bose, who is trying to further his own interests, must be taken with a grain of salt.". On May 2, "Relazioni internazionali" published (pp. 494 ff.) the radio address that Bose had given from "an unspecified radio station" (actually from Rome) on the occasion of the twenty-third anniversary of the Amritsar massacre. g. Ciano, Diario cit., p. 617 (May 5, 1942): "I accompany Bose to the Duce. A long conversation, but with no new elements except for the fact that Mussolini allowed himself to be persuaded by Bose's arguments to immediately

obtain the Tripartite Declaration for Indian independence. He telegraphed the Germans proposing, contrary to the decisions made in Salzburg, to proceed without delay with the declaration. I believe that Hitler will not agree so easily." DDI, s. IX, Vili, pp. 571 ff. The news about the situation in India to which the telegram referred and on which Bose had certainly entertained Mussolini most likely concerned the crisis that had arisen after the failure of the Cripps mission at the top of the Congress Party between supporters and opponents of an agreement with the Muslim League and of immediate recourse to civil disobedience to force the British to grant full independence to the country and withdraw from it, as well as between those (and at that time Gandhi also seemed to be among them) who hoped that once the British presence was removed, Japan would have no "reason to hold a grudge against India" (which, however, if attacked, according to some would defend itself, while according to others should also implement non-cooperation against the Japanese) and those (such as Nehru) who instead considered Japan an imperialist nation. A fairly accurate picture of the state of information that Rome had on this situation and wanted to make known to Italians is offered above all by the Political and Economic Panorama of the Middle and Far East published by 'Asiatica." Relazioni internazionali also published extensive documentation on India. It should be noted, however, that while Asiatica, which was published by ISMEO and was more directly influenced by those most involved in Indian issues, had always closely followed developments in India, Relazioni internazionali, which was published by ISPI and more directly linked to the leadership at Palazzo Chigi, began to devote considerable space to India, especially from mid-March onwards. From that date until July 25, 1943, Relazioni internazionali published numerous articles and sometimes even editorials, in addition to the news reported in the Documentation section. For the latter, see Churchill and India (March 14, 1942, pp. 285 ff.), The Fate of India (April 11, 1942, pp. 397 ff.), Cripps's Failure (April 25, 1942, pp. 453 ff.), Tempo di decisione per il popolo indiano (July 11, 1942, p. 761), Dopo la decisione del Congresso: l'India fra due fuochi (August 22, 1942, p. 901), Churchill and the Indian crisis (September 19, 1942, p. 1001), Washington and India: The Phillips mission (January 2, 1943, p. 1). Around mid-March 1942, articles on India began to appear in general political magazines. See, for example, V. Varanini, L'ora dell'India, in Gerarchia, March 1942, pp. 128 ff., L. Cipriani, India inquieta, ibid., May 1942, pp. 209 ff., E. Canevari, L'India e gli Inglesi, in "La vita italiana," April 1942, pp. 317 ff., and in the same issue (pp. 324 ff.) E. Vicari, Perché l'India non è insorta, in which the fact that India had not yet risen up against the British was attributed, among other things, to the machinations... of the Jews, who took advantage of the humanitarian sentiments and mystical temperament of Gandhi, who represented "the purest expression of the Indian people" and "the voice most listened to by all Hindus", in order to "circumvent and dominate him"... Following this examination, and above all in view of the military situation, which in the meantime, after the almost total Japanese occupation of Burma and the British landing in Madagascar, had undergone important developments, the Duce considered it advisable for Italy and Germany to review and update the decisions that had already been taken in Salzburg in this regard. It was then, as is well known, decided to postpone this public and joint declaration until a more favorable military moment and to make the necessary communications in this regard to the Japanese government, which had

been theinitiator. This was in fact duly carried out a few days ago by the German government and by us. It would now be a question of revising this decision in the sense that if the Japanese government were to decide on its own, as it is free to do and will most likely do, to proceed even in our absence with a unilateral declaration, albeit only towards India, such a declaration should not only be assured of Italian and German support and backing by exclusively propaganda means, but also be formally endorsed by Italy and Germany. In addition to the developments in the military situation mentioned above, the news that has arrived in recent days on the internal situation in India and on the state of public opinion, which is increasingly disoriented and uncertain and which could, as such, be greatly reinvigorated in an anti-British sense if this position were to be taken without further ado by the two powers of the. On the other hand, it should be considered that if Japan, which has already taken an explicit and formal position on Indian independence through Tojo's speeches, were to proceed in our absence and on its own behalf with further public and formal demonstrations in the same vein, it would undoubtedly appear to be exercising a sort of political monopolypolitical initiative over the whole of Asia, which arouses suspicion among the Asian peoples and it is not clear how and in what way this could benefit the two Axis Powers. Please urgently bring the above to the attention of your government and ask it to reconsider the decisions already taken in this regard, letting us know its thoughts and opinion as soon as possible. As was to be expected, Mussolini's move immediately met with the full approval of the Japanese, and Oshima, speaking with Alfieri, not only said he was convinced that it had come at the right moment because Japanese forces were close to the borders of India. Certain locations in Bengal have already been attacked by the Japanese air force, and unrest has begun among those populations, which, as it worsens, will inevitably have repercussions on the internal situation in India. The planned declaration onIndia would also have an impact on this situation, but he reiterated the need for the declaration to concern both India and the Arab countries, because if figures such as the Grand Mufti and Gaylani were fully aware of the intentions of the Axis powers regarding the Arab world, the masses, if the declaration were restricted to the Indian problem, would feel ignored and a sense of disillusionment would form among them. The German reaction, on the other hand, was entirely negative. As Ciano had predicted, Hitler categorically refused to reconsider what had been decided in Salzburg. And if, in the end, he agreed at least to receive Bose (who until then had not managed to get beyond von Ribbentrop's office), it was not because Mussolini had asked him to, but because in the meantime the terms of the question had substantially changed and what the Indian leader wanted to talk to him about was no longer so much the release or not of the declaration ofindependence, but rather, given how things had developed at that point, his return to the East to lead the Indian national movement that was organizing in Burma. This solution, albeit for slightly different reasons, suited both Hitler and Mussolini. The audience took place on the afternoon of May 29 at the Führer's headquarters, just one week after instructions had been sent from Rome to Alfieri to inform von Ribbentrop of Bose's desire to return to India and to advocate a meeting between him and Hitler. The next day, Alfieri reported to Rome on how it had gone: I report on the conversation that took place yesterday between the Führer and Bose: during the first of the two speeches, the Führer told Bose that he considered any declaration of independence,

whether by India or the Arab countries, to be inappropriate at the moment, since, given the current state of military operations, it could only be a completely platonic declaration. The situation would be different on the day when the Allied forces, descending from the Caucasus, were to be dealt with.India or the Arab countries, since, given the current state of military operations, it could only be a completely platonic declaration. The situation would be different on the day when the Allied forces, descending from the Caucasus, were to appear in the Near and Middle East. Referring to the start of the offensive in Libya, the Führer suggested that the possible extension of military operations to Egyptian territory could be the right moment for such a declaration, especially with regard to the Arab countries. Bose, taking note of the Führer's statements, pointed out that India's effective independence would provoke a favorable reaction among the Indian people, whom England tends to make believe that the Axis powers desire nothing more than to replace its rule inIndia. The Führer then told Bose that if the German armed forces were currently at the borders of India, he would not have deprived himself of his valuable collaboration and would have sought his advice on the development of possible operations in Indian territory, but since there are currently Japanese and not German forces at the borders ofIndia are Japanese and not German, he left him free to remain in Berlin, where his presence would be welcome, or to go to Burma to carry out his revolutionary program. Bose expressed his gratitude to the Führer for the freedom of movement granted to him and persisted in his intention to travel to Italy in the first half of June to assess the technical feasibility of the journey he proposed to undertake. Bose, referring to his conversation with the Führer, thanked me for the support granted to him by this Ministry of Foreign Affairs and asked me to express to you, Your Excellency, his heartfelt and cordial gratitude for the intervention of the Fascist Government with the Reich Government, an intervention which he considers to have been truly decisive in achieving the goal he desired. It is highly unlikely that Bose thought he could intervene in the work of the Indian National Council convened for the second half of June in Bangkok. However, certain that, at this point, he wanted to return to the Far East as soon as possible. In Rome, where Lieutenant Colonel Moscatelli's Rome-Tokyo-Rome flight was being prepared, the possibility of organizing a direct flight for him from Rhodes to Rangoon was studied; However, this idea was abandoned because the Germans were opposed to it due to the excessive risks that, in their opinion, the undertaking would present, and they were of the opinion that it would be better to use a submarine. However, the organization of the trip took much longer than expected, so that Bose's departure from Kiel would only take place on February 2, 1943, and his arrival in Sabang, Indonesia, on June 5. After thethe official announcement of Bose's meeting with Mussolini and the audience granted to him by Hitler, the silence that had been maintained until then on the presence of the nationalist leader in Europe came to an immediate end, and the Italian side moved on to a shrewd exploitation of his figure and of the Indian liberation movement he represented, but even more so of the Indian situation in general, its prospects, and the weight it would have, sooner or later, on the course of the conflict overall course of the conflict. There is no doubt that the moment was particularly conducive to such promotion. On the eastern front, the Wehrmacht was on the attack, targeting Stalingrad, the lower Volga and Rostov, and then the Caucasus (with the precious oil fields of Baku), from

where the German push was to subsequently spread towards Iran and the Middle East. In North Africa, Italian-German troops were also on the offensive. After Tobruk surrendered on June 21, Rommel, as we shall see in the next chapter, wanted to continue the offensive, which in two weeks took him to El Alamein, instead of settling on the Sollum-Halfaya line as initially planned and concentrating his efforts on Malta. A stone's throw from Alexandria and the Suez Canal, the course of the war seemed to be at a turning point for theAxis, and for Italy in particular, to be at a turning point: caught between the two jaws of the Axis pincer, the one advancing on the Caucasus and the one that had repelled the British along the northern Egyptian coast, the Middle East appeared open to its armies. In this perspective, the Japanese contribution could be the decisive completion, and in fact, in July, the Italians had approached Tokyo to propose thatopportunity to direct its main effort towards Ceylon and the Indian Ocean rather than Australia2. With Japan's support, it also gained greater importance than mere 26 June 1943 (it can also be seen reproduced in 'Relazioni internazionali', July 3, 1943, p. 561). In it, Bose expressed optimism about the possibility of an Indian uprising. As far as Bose is concerned, the ISMEO's translation of his book (published in English in 1935, but enriched for thethe Italian edition with an appendix in which Bose summarized the events from 1934 to 1942) La lotta dell'India (1920-1934) (The Struggle of India), which went on sale in July 1942, and the publication in "Asiatica" (September-December 1942, pp. 362 ff.) of a lengthy article, L'India e la sterra (India and the Earth), which brought the discussion in the book up to the very latest developments in the internal situation in India. See A. Pirelli, Taccuini cit., pp. 340 ff. Already on May 12, before Rommel decided to take the offensive to the Delta, Alfieri had sounded out Japanese intentions on this matter with Oshima, obtaining a generally favorable response. As he reported to Rome on the same day, "When asked whether, as a general and a soldier, he considered it possible, in a subsequent phase of the war, for the Axis forces to join forces with those of Japan in the Near East, that is, in the Suez area, Oshima replied decisively in the affirmative: control of the Suez area would constitute possession of the keystone of the world situation, given that communications between Europe and Asia would come under the control of the Tripartite Powers, which would then find themselves in an unassailable position in the face of any efforts by their adversaries. In order to achieve this union, it was necessary for the Italian-German forces to reach Egypt and for the next offensive in Russia to yield good results. Then it would be easy for Japan to join the Axis, by sea, in the aforementioned area. (asmae, Political Affairs, Italy, b. 84,1942, phase. 'Declaration of Arab Countries'). the contribution of the Indian national movement as a whole that had been attributed to it until then: if India had exploded against the British, the game would have been irretrievably over for them, even without (and, indeed, better) the Japanese, now in Burma, having to engage in direct military action on its enormous territory, for which, as they were engagedin China and the Pacific, and which could have provoked adverse reactions from India. In this context, it is clear that the regime had an internal interest in promoting the figure of Bose and, more generally, the Indian card. It is also understandable how initiatives that in some way referred to this could take shape or be taken seriously. Among those carried out were the establishment by the SIM, alongside the Military Center for the Preparation of Arabs, of a similar center for Indians (the first "Italian" nucleus of the

Indian Legion that the Germans were organizing with a view to deploying it once they had crossed the Caucasus), but also 'commandos' to be used behind British lines and the recruitment of volunteers from among the Indians taken prisoner in Africa to be directly incorporated into the Italian army. Among the initiatives that were considered but not implemented, it is worth mentioning one that obtained Mussolini's approvaland because it was conceived by two of Garibaldi's grandsons, Ricciotti and Giuseppe, was to send a group of officers to India, in view of the deterioration of the internal situation there, under the command of Ricciotti Garibaldi himself, with the task of making contact, with the help of Bose's movement and the clandestine organizations headed by it, with the Italian prisoners interned there, preparing their escape and subsequent use, partly in guerrilla operations alongside the nationalists, and in organic formations that would fight alongside the Japanese. Until, between the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, the general picture of the war for the Axis and for Italy in particular became completely negative, the figure of Chandra Bose and his promotion were not a key asset in the regime's 'Indian policy'. The importance that Mussolini, and in the spring and summer of 1942 also the Supreme Command, attached to relations with Japan and theevolution of the internal situation in India and the influence of Shedai and Enderle's advice on Palazzo Chigi meant that during this period the attention paid to events in India (and the effort made to avoid missteps that could negatively affect their evolution or relations with the Japanese) translated, given theimpossibility of direct political initiatives into a general political attitude and discourse that went well beyond the valorization of Bose in terms of the Italian "internal front," and took into account other components of the political framework, particularly those that at that moment appeared most likely to favor a clearly anti-British evolution according to the perspective of the two main parties involved: the Japanese, who were increasingly reluctant to engage in a full-scale attack on Indian territory, and the Indians themselves, who wanted to achieve full independence and believed that the moment was particularly favorable for persuading London to grant it, but who, for the most part, did not share Bose's radicalism and remained rather attached to thethe approach to the struggle for independence taken by the 'moderate' national movement and Gandhi in particular. This led to a more dynamic and articulated political discourse than would have been possible by focusing entirely on the figure and struggle of Chandra Bose, which also highlighted other more or less potential forces in Indian politics and even the figure of Gandhi and the disruptive role that his actions could have played. As is clear from a first reading of the 'information' press and even more so of the specialized press ('Asiatica' and above all 'Relazioni internazionali'), after the failure of the Cripps mission and the subsequent worsening of tensions between Indian nationalists and the British, Gandhi returned for several months to being considered, first with great caution and ultimately with skepticism, then with growing conviction, not only a decisive element of Indian reality, but also the one from whom one could expect, directly or indirectly, new events capable of finally setting in motion the process of self-liberation ofand thus bring about the end of the British presence in the country, with all the consequences that this would have had on the course of the conflict. The moment when Gandhi enjoyed, so to speak, the greatest fortune and when it was most thought that the Indian situation could precipitate in a short time was mainly at the end of July and during

August, when tension in India reached its highest levels. Gandhi affirmed the need for mass non-violent civil disobedience to force London to grant full independence to the country. There was talk of a possible hunger strike to the bitter end and of his willingness to negotiate with the Japanese. The British responded by arresting not only Gandhi, Nehru, the president of the Indian Congress Azad, and many other nationalist leaders, thereby provoking a series of conflicts with the police. But even in the following months, when the political climate in India returned to being less heated, luck and, ultimately, hopes in the Mahatma declined only partially in Italy, so much so that even dependence, occupying troops on the ground, who would oppose external invasion. We must intervene energetically, with our comments, to open the eyes of the Indians to this maneuver, which would mean the perpetuation of Indian slavery and a deception of the intelligence of that people' (acs, Min. Cultura Popolare, Gabinetto, b. 77, fase. 'Rapporto giornalisti'). Despite the widespread belief that the Indian situation was deteriorating (W. Churchill, The Second World War, op. cit., IV, II, p. 119, compared the situation in 1942 to that of 1857 and quoted a message from the Viceroy of India dated August 20, which stated: "We are facing a terrible situation and I am not at all sure that the worst is over; however, I am hopeful that the situation will become clearer before the Japanese or Germans are in a position to press directly against our borders"). On August 14 (Gandhi had been arrested on the 9th and conflicts with the police and attacks were multiplying), Pavolini instructed the daily press not to indulge in overly optimistic predictions and deadlines: "As far as India is concerned, we continue to report on the unrest there (and to highlight this news) as an open wound in the heart of the British Empire, a wound that will never heal. We can talk about a national revolution underway in India without assigning it a more or less immediate or distant deadline. We acknowledge that the issue is open and that India is marching towards independence. This also serves to permanently demolish enemy propaganda about the aims of the war, which were set out in the Atlantic Charter in terms that are completely contradicted by the Indian question. This is therefore a formidable propaganda weapon that we have at our disposal. In this regard, it is worth noting the American position, i.e.interference ofAmerica, which has its own troops and politicians there and always tries to separate its responsibility from that of the British, without succeeding, however, because the very presence of its troops denies Indian independence in the same way as the presence of British troops. But these are troops that are not associated with repression and, in essence, America also seems to be preparing itself for that position of universal heir to the British Empire' (ibid.). Ctr. f. s., India's resistance to British maneuvers, in "International Relations," August 1, 1942, p. 830; id., From Wardh's resolution to Gandhi's arrest, ibid., August 15, 1942, p. 879; Documenti della crisi indiana, ibid., August 15 and 22, 1942, pp. 895 ff. and 919 ff.; "Asiatica," September-December 1942, pp. 650 ff. . . On the situation in India during this period, see M. Brecher, Nehru. A Political Biography, London 1959, pp. 282 ff., and above all W. Churchill, The Second World War, cit., IV, I, pp. 242 ff. and II, pp. 117 ff.... See F. S., Gandhi's Fast and the Crisis between India and London, in "Relazioni internazionali," February 20, 1943 "International Relations" would dedicate one of the medallions in its "Men of the Day" column to him. At this point, attention and, above all, hopes returned to focus on Chandra Bose only on the eve of the regime's collapse, when,

moreover, the situation in India had practically been resolved in favor of the British (partly because of widespread popular hostility towards the Japanese and partly because the national movement had lost much of its leadership and political initiative with the arrest of its leading figures) and the Japanese had staked everything on the Bengali leader who had finally arrived in the East. But by then it was only Mussolini who was paying attention and placing his hopes in him, and in those circumstances no one in the Foreign Ministry, the Supreme Command, or even among the Duce's closest collaborators, was thinking about India. If we were to base ourselves solely on the famous line from his speech on June 24, 1943, to the National Directorate of the National Fascist Party, "Bose, who does not fast, is at the gates of India," one might think that Mussolini's attention and hopes were based on a mixture of feelings, resentments, and extreme illusions that actually had little to do with Bose and India. One might think of it as a last-ditch attempt to give Italians some hope by dangling the possibility of a new reversal in the course of the war, or, on a completely different level, an extreme attempt to hold on to the Japanese so that they would help him convince Hitler of the need to negotiate with Stalin. One might also think of it as a sort of self-delusion and even a polemical manifestation of the disappointment caused in him by the failure of the hopes he had placed in Gandhi in previous months. On closer inspection, however, none of these hypotheses seems truly convincing. That Mussolini was motivated solely by domestic political considerations is highly doubtful. If this had been the case, it would be difficult to understand why, on July 6, he sent a telegram to the ambassador in Tokyo with a message for the Japanese prime minister in which he expressed his full support for the policy that Japan was implementing towards the occupied countries ("the most suitable for resolving the problems of East Asia), he instructed him to tell General Tojo "that I consider the most concrete help to be urgent and necessary." p. 178. The publication of M. Borsa, Gandhi e il risorgimento indiano (Gandhi and the Indian Resurgence), Milan 1942, should also be seen in this context. F. S., "Uomini del giorno: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi" (Men of the Day: Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi), in "Relazioni internazionali" (International Relations), March 6, 1943, p. 230. See, in addition to the aforementioned interview with Bose in Il popolo d'Italia, D. B., La nomina di Wavell a viceré dell'India, in Relazioni internazionali, July 3, 1943, p. 552, and Attività di Bose, ibid., July 24, 1943, p. 612. See Mussolini, XXXI, p. 196. to Bose, whom I know personally and consider capable of accomplishing the task undertaken." Nor is the hypothesis any more convincing that, by supporting Bose and showing that he had full confidence in him, he hoped to secure the good offices of the Japanese with Hitler. He was well aware that Tokyo shared his view on the need for the Führer to resolve the conflict in the East in some way, and it is difficult to believe that he hoped to induce the Japanese government to make a greater commitment in this regard with such a ploy, especially since, even if there was a connection between the two issues, the timing of their implementation was very different, particularly as regards the repercussions on the Italian situation. And that Mussolini was fully aware of this is demonstrated by what he said to Ambassador Hidaka on the morning of July 25: "You Japanese go ahead and use Bose. That's fine. But it will be next spring before you achieve anything, and it will be too late to help us."The hypothesis of a sort of self-delusion remains, but even that seems difficult to accept if we look beyond the watershed of July 25 and

consider the latest developments in Mussolini's position with regard to events in India during the Italian Social Republic. In saying this, we are not referring so much to a series of acts, from the recognition on November 1, 1943, of the provisional government of free India established by Bose, to the contacts with Bose's representative in Europe, Nambiar, and through the embassy in Tokyo with Bose himself, to the various messages of good wishes or praise on the occasion of particular anniversaries or events, which were certainly also motivated by the need for the Italian Social Republic to reaffirm its existence as a sovereign state and as a partner in the Tripartite Pact whenever it could. What seems to us if not decisive (since, undoubtedly, it was also motivated by the desire to give a breath of fresh air to the increasingly weak hopes of his followers in a new course of the conflict), certainly very important in trying to penetrate Mussolini's actual position is the note 'India to the Indians' in the 'Corrispondenza repubblicana" of March 26, 1944. Written in response to the news that Japanese and Chandra Bose's troops had crossed the Burmese border and were advancing into Indian territory, it is in fact a sort of summary of Mussolini's position, which includes, above all, other people's considerations and polemical points, without naming them, against the Germans, both for their attitude towards the populations of the occupied countries, which is contrasted with the policy of the Japanese "in the most intelligent sense of the word," and for not having agreed to the request to commit to the independence ofIndia, but which, on the whole, seems to us to render it faithfully and thus allows us to understand it fairly well, so much so that we feel it appropriate to quote it at some length: The event that may have a decisive influence on the course of the war and unpredictable developments in world history has occurred. The tireless and heroic Japanese armies of the Tenno, together with those of Chandra Bose in India, have crossed the eastern borders of India, starting from Burma, which the Anglo-Americans had set out to reconquer. The event had been eagerly awaited since the day Chandra Bose left Europe and arrived in Burma by mysterious means, where he formed the first units of the National Army. The event was awaited and feared by the English world, which could no longer hide its growing concern behind a facade of impassivity. Now the die is cast. Japan's policy, and we say 'policy' in the most intelligent sense of the word, has achieved a resounding success, due above all to the trust that the Tokyo government has managed to inspire in Chandra Bose and the Indian people. The door to India could not be opened fromfrom within through a popular uprising, which the Anglo-American forces would have easily crushed, nor from without with the troops organized by Chandra Bose alone, too weak in numbers and armament to face the enemy on their own. The cooperation of Japan was necessary. Once the door had been broken down, the Anglo-American border divisions defeated, and the formula of 'India for the Indians' proclaimed by the head of the Japanese government, Tojo, with all the necessary solemnity and immediate, indispensable practical application, the formula of 'India to the Indians' in full independence, it is very likely that the insurrection from within will contribute to the Japanese-Indian war effort and that the day of liberation from British rule has truly dawned for India. We are careful not to predict a rapid course of events. When we say that India is a world unto itself, we are not resorting to verbal exaggeration. Suffice it to say that some 400 million people live in that part of Asia. When we say that India is a world unto itself also from the point of view of races, religions, languages, fauna, flora, a

world from a historical and spiritual point of view, a world unto itself with elements that for us Westerners sometimes appear to be outdated paradoxes and atavistic remnants, we are stating something that is true... Despite the complexity of things, despite British rule, which is prudent and, when necessary, extremely cruel, the movement for Indian independence is in full swing, directed and organized by the three major political associations headed by Gandhi, Savarka, and Ginnah. The program of these associations is not uniform in its procedures and details, but the fact remains that the slogan "India for the Indians,", which means "out with the British," is the slogan that unites everyone from the Himalayas to Ceylon, from Calcutta to Bombay. Great Britain has always speculated on the difficulty of organizing such a vast and multifaceted world, especially due to the presence and dominance of the Brahmin castes, but there is no doubt that these difficulties have often been created, and in many cases aggravated, by British policy and that, once free, the Indians will find a way to resolve them themselves, without the need for foreign guardians and masters. From the 1857 uprising to the present day, the Indian martyrdom for the cause of independence has been uninterrupted. Alongside the martyrdom of the precursors is the endless suffering of the multitudes reduced to dying of poverty and hunger, as the London government itself has had to acknowledge on several occasions. Certain acts in the long drama, such as passive resistance, fasting, and Gandhi's imprisonment, have made the cause of Indian independence well known and popular. From passive resistance, which could not solve the problem but only bring it to the attention of the world, the country has moved on to attacking the foreign oppressor with the force of national arms. These are dark days for London. Chandra Bose is a man of exceptional energy. If, as is likely, the Anglo-American forces begin to retreat, the Indian masses will light the torches of revolt. Meanwhile, the Indian borders have been crossed. The wheel of destiny is turning. In this war full of the unexpected and the unpredictable, the Indian phase has begun, following that of the Pacific... To see these words as a manifestation of self-delusion is too simplistic. To truly understand them, it is more useful to refer to some key aspects of Mussolini's strategic and political thinking and his spiritual attitude towards life, action, and the future. First: the importance Mussolini attributed to India as the heart and decisive keystone, together with Suez and the Middle East, of the British Empire and, therefore, to the expulsion of the British from it. Second: the now firmly held conviction that, as the events of the summer of 1942 had shown, 'the movement for Indian independence', although 'in full development', needed the active presence of the Japanese and their proclamation and concrete implementation of 'the formula of "India for the Indians"' in order to become effective and assume strategic value. These were two decisive circumstances that had been lacking in the policy towards the Arabs, and their absence explains why Mussolini, while placing so much trust in the outbreak of the Indian uprising (even though he did not hide the fact that it would not have 'a rapid course' and did not underestimate the 'historical' and 'spiritual' reasons that held it back), had stopped betting on the Arab card in 1943, in which he had believed and relied on so much, and had to consider it practically worthless by then. Third: the influence on him of the conviction we have already mentioned that the outcome of the conflict was 'hanging by a thread" (or, to use an expression coined the previous year by Ugo Spirito, to the "unpredictability of the future") and still open to any possibility, provided

that one knew how to take advantage of it, as, in fact, he believed the Japanese were doing, and doing so in an area he considered decisive and therefore capable of finally turning 'the wheel of fate' in a direction favorable to Japan and, consequently, to the entire Tripartite. The issues we have focused on so far offer new elements for a richer and more nuanced reconstruction of the relations between Rome and Berlin and for a better understanding of how these relations, which already in the phase of the "parallel war" had been at the heart of Italian politics and Mussolini's strategy, became the determining factor in the "long war." The overall picture of Italian-German relations that emerges nevertheless differs from that reconstructed inthe historiography over the last twenty-five years only in terms of the greater wealth of elements and the more precise attention to how Mussolini moved or tried to move within them. Hence the need, at this point, to broaden the discussion so that it is not limited to the political-diplomatic moment and, more precisely, to the decisive weight that Italian-German relations had, on the one hand, on the course of military operations in the Mediterranean and, on the other, on the "brutality," to use Deakin's word, of Berlin's policy.-German relations, on the one hand, the course of military operations in the Mediterranean and, on the other, the 'brutality', to use Deakin's word, of Berlin's policy. Such a view is in fact too simplistic: it allows us to grasp facts that are undoubtedly true and important, but which do not exhaust the question and to which excessive weight is attributed or which, in any case, need to be articulated further, taking into account aspects that too often remain in the background and are taken for granted, while it is precisely from these that it is most often necessary to start in order to effectively understand Italian-German relations, seen not in and of themselves, but in the overall context of the Italian war effort. In our opinion, the course of military operations and the incentives the possibilities it offered to German hegemonic policy, would not have been sufficient on their own to determine such a massive influence on Italian politics as a whole. On closer inspection, it brought to fruition and gave political substance to a state of mind and criticism of the fascist regime that had been latent in Germany for some time and had become more pronounced during the period of "non-belligerence." Very useful for understanding both what nourished this state of mind and what the criticisms of Italy and, what interests us most here, of the regime, focused on, as well as their impact on Berlin's attitude, is a long "Report on the Italian political situation" written by Rudolf Likus, a long-time collaborator and "special advisor" to von Ribbentrop, in early 1941 in the wake of the irritation and concern aroused by Italian setbacks in Greece and North Africa and in the context of the reconsideration of German policy towards Italy that these setbacks had triggered. Although the document was strongly influenced by the particular hostility that the Germans, and especially von Ribbentrop, had long harbored towards Ciano (nor can it be ruled out that it was intended to induce Hitler to ask Mussolini to remove his son-in-law from political office), can in fact be considered a largely indicative reflection of how the fascist regime and the Italian situation were judged in Berlin and of the problems they caused at the highest political levels of the Reich. The war, Likus claimed, by exposing the failure of the fascist ruling class, its corruption, its identification with "industrialism," its dependence on the 'Ciano oligarchy', had brought the regime's crisis to a head, leading, on the one hand, to 'the detachment and transfer of power (including the party) from the Duce to the Ciano

oligarchy' and, on the other, to 'the opposition of the people and fascism to the oligarchy'. Faced with this reality, "the worst evil would be, Likus observed, if a poor understanding of Italian affairs were to push Germany to eight years of Starace's leadership" into "superficial and decorative activism," into a "policy of uniforms and parades," without succeeding in creating its own ruling class, dissolving the family by breaking it up into its various organizations, so that "immorality, a national danger, given the lack of self-control, especially among women, spread, creeping into politics and becoming corruption" and "the qualities, where they had come to the fore," instead of progressing, had regressed. By 1936, this situation had worsened. Until then, there had been a certain "circulation of men": "Although they were taken in rotation from a small group, the rapid succession of various people in the same position of command compensated for their lack of preparation and sense of responsibility. The mistakes of the predecessor were eliminated by those of the successor, who, for the most part, developed in the opposite direction, and so on and so forth, until the administered body was left immobile and intact'. With the war in Africa, the 'latent crisis of the regime' had undergone an 'open and visible development': on the one hand, the levers of power had fallen into the hands of an oligarchy, and on the other, the war had opened the door to speculation: 'Ciano's appointment as foreign minister struck this precarious system, immobilizing it. The only active aspect of this policy, the compensation of errors, was eliminated with the immobilization of those in power. The state organism underwent a considerable geological stratification at the lowest level... A small oligarchy took control of the levers of command; the circulation of men, which had in some way alleviated the lack of preparation, ceased abruptly. The entire regime was now immobilized, ready to serve the political and economic directives economic directives of an oligarchy that had no right to represent the nation nor any awareness of its responsibilities. For Likus, the deus ex machina of all this was Ciano, who had placed 'his' men (and here, lumping everyone together, the 'Ragguaglio' listed the most disparate names, Bottai, Muti, Pavolini, Starace, and even Farinacci) 'in the nerve centers of the regime', 'in exchange for absolute adherence to his directives', who did not hide his aspiration to succeed Mussolini and who acted as a link between the oligarchy, the bureaucracy (which the demands of war had superimposed on the corporations, 'nullifying their work'), the political class, both attracted by the 'easy and unlimited profits' that supplies and works related to the conquest and colonization of Ethiopia opened up for them, and true capitalism, which, until then, fascism had tried to keep under control. "When the oligarchy found itself in power, the process of alliance between business and the political class was already well advanced; it ended by identifying itself with capitalism. Fascism in power took on the character of a new plutocratic wave without limits or measure." Everything that happened after that was, according to Likus, a series of consequences at all levels of the "proconsular conspiracy" hatched by Ciano during the war in Africa and carried on by him in the following years. This largely resulted in Italy's military inferiority, its unpreparedness, and above all, the fundamental misunderstandings that had arisen in Italian-German relations-German relations, the strategic errors, the Italian defeats and, therefore, the precariousness of the Italian situation, both from an internal point of view and in terms of Italy's reliability as an ally for Germany: 'The halt in the movement of men led to discontent and then open

hostility towards all the political ambitions that the Starace system had created everywhere. TheThe only force of the regime lost all its power. Fascism, aware of the moral betrayal that was taking place to its detriment, distanced itself from the party. Unconsciously but rightly, it avoided conflict with the people, preferring opposition to the leaders rather than struggle with the people, whose aspirations were based on the social ideals preached by the revolution. On the eve of the war, two of the aspects of the crisis already mentioned were visible: the detachment and transfer of power (including the party) from the Duce to the Ciano oligarchy, and the opposition of the people and fascism to the oligarchy. 'maintain the current situation'; However, it would have been equally detrimental to take sides against the other. The results would have been equally negative. In the worst case, the collapse of the regime would not have been avoided, paving the way for the prevalence of anti-German forces and the destruction of the Axis; in the best case, serious risks would have been run that it was absolutely necessary to avoid, both in relation to the present and, above all, to the future. In this regard, the 'Ragguaglio', the Italian situation should not be underestimated, as it will be the indirect keystone of the future European system, in the sense that an expanded Germany with heavy burdens will be strong in proportion to the cooperation it can find. A hostile and enemy Italy could be the center of a new force which, in the period following the peace, could be dangerous and force Germany to make exhausting efforts. No organizational capacity can create a vital environment when there is no connivance, at least passive. On the contrary, Germany had to show that its aid was "for the entire Italian people," for all its components and institutions, without distinction. First and foremost, it had to foster the best relations "between the Italian monarchy and army and the military and organizational forces of Germany," since "the industrial elements bound within a corporative regime can only follow the directives given." Here we are talking about the monarchy and the army, the "Ragguaglio" specified, regardless of doctrinal concepts or sympathy: they are the only forces that can assume a permanent character such as to ensure indefinite collaboration over time. We must not forget that beyond the figure of the Duce there is the still unquenchable ferment of Italian history. A step towards demagogy, a system that was not stopped by intangible internal limits, could reawaken communal Italy, which would be by definition anti-German, as it has been anti-imperial since the time of Dante. Italian particularism has only this point of agreement. On the other hand, what Italians admire in Germany is solely its military and state organization. And this is thethe element on which everyone agreesto accept deep collaboration without mistrust and touchiness. Therefore, collaboration between the aforementioned bodies appears to be the simplest and most natural; this is independent of the personality of the Duce, who can and must remain and thus find relief from responsibilities that are becoming too heavy day by day. As for the regime itself, Likus considered it, on the one hand, harmful and, on the other, non-existent and reduced to the person of Mussolini and to the prestige and "affection" of the people and the old squadrismo that the "Duce" still enjoyed. "The regime," he wrote, "is linked in its current form to the personal position of the Duce. Many believe that he can remain but must grant more opportunities to capable men and technical organizations." Given his personal position, Mussolini was and had to remain a fixed point of reference for Germany, even though Likus clearly showed that he did not believe in the

possibility that the "Duce" could regain control of the situation, which he himself had partly created and then tolerated, and revitalize the regime: The effort Mussolini must make to get out of the complex he himself has created is enormous: in these bodies [Grand Council, Senate, Chamber of Fasci and Corporations, National Corporate Council, etc.] the oligarchy has nestled, clienteles have grown up around them, and a whole life has been created that has relations with the bureaucracy and the party. The first step must be the removal of theoligarchy, then reorganizing the bodies, and finally creating men who can serve the state with dignity. In short, building the backbone of the new ruling class after clearing away the debris of the failed one. Can Mussolini do it? First of all, he cannot now fully understand a problem that he has considered secondary for twenty years; secondly, he has no chance of seeing directly; he sees through bodies and people who are themselves incapable of understanding... The conviction that fascism was in crisis to the point of being seriously exposed to the danger of complete collapse, which even Mussolini could almost certainly not have avoided, is not only evident in the "Ragguaglio." Other German documents and testimonies (from that time and later) take the same view, although they placeemphasis on certain aspects of the crisis rather than others, assessing Mussolini's chances of curbing it differently and hypothesizing different German outcomes and countermeasures. We have focused on this because, given the breadth of the argument, the strictly internal and secret nature of the document, and the fact that it was drawn up by one of the most important centers of the Nazi regime for use by its top leaders, Likus' analysis and proposals seem to us to be of particular value in understanding the attitude Berlin's policy towards Rome in 1941-42 and not reduce everything solely to the backlash of the unfortunate course of Italian military operations and the 'brutality' of German policy. That both these factors influenced Berlin's attitude and policy is certainly a fact, but it is equally certain that they were not the only ones, nor, on closer inspection, the most important ones. The real punctum dolens for the Germans was another: the conviction that the fascist regime was deeply ill (primarily due to incompetence, inefficiency, and corruption, as well as historical and racial flaws) to the point that it could even collapse, with all the political and military consequences that this would have had for Germany. It was so sick and unstable that even for the less radical, such as Likus, it was unthinkable to commit themselves fully to supporting it: it was better to limit themselves to the minimum aid necessary to prevent it from collapsing on the battlefield. Having said this about Germany, let us now turn to Italy. For Italy, the punctum dolens of its relations with Germany, rather than thethe progress of military operations and the Germans' distrust of the Italian armed forces and the regime's ability to control the internal situation, was the shortage and, in some cases, the lack of raw materials needed to sustain the war effort. Suffice it to say that in 1939, domestic production of raw materials was equal to about 21 percent of annual requirements and that during the war,Italy, according to military calculations, was only able to secure 51 percent of the necessary raw materials from abroad; the lack of equipment and efficient industrial organization capable of making the best use of available resources and German supplies; the unavailability of machine tools and essential parts for equipment that had been ordered from abroad (often the US) and had not been delivered due to the deterioration of the international situation; the scarcity of clear ideas and, often, inefficiency and the consequent

tendency to avoid the risks arising from taking on pre was in Rome at the end of January 1942, he mentioned to Mussolini the 'rumorsthat 'the population of Sicily seems to sympathize greatly with England'. The 'Duce' replied that these rumors 'arose because he had ordered, by special measure, the transfer of a large number of Sicilian employees to the Italian mainland. In Sicily, only the aristocracy, which constitutes a small minority, is favorable to the British. Otherwise, the rumors are completely unfounded. There is no reason to worry about the patriotism of the Sicilians, and he has also publicly expressed his conviction about the patriotism and fascist sentiment of the Sicilians in press releases. Furthermore, a typical island mentality reigns among Sicilians: they always believe they are being persecuted. Symptomatically, he himself addressed the issue of other "rumors" according to which the Prince of Piedmont was a rebel: the crown prince, like the Dukes of Aosta and Spoleto, said, "He is not a rebel at all, but he is absolutely a fascist" (ddi, s. IX, Vili, p. 235).. The following September, when Vidussoni visited Italian troops in Russia and had a series of contacts with German political and military leaders, both he and the other members of the PNF delegation with him had no difficulty in seeing how alive and widespread these fears were, sometimes expressed in harsh terms, to the point that several of their German interlocutors spoke openly of concerns about internal order and even about a "possible collapse of the internal front that would bring anti-fascist and therefore anti-German currents to power." They urged their Italian comrades to exercise "strict control over the population" and to consider as traitors "not only those who betray or fail in their duties, but also those who show themselves to be lukewarm and uncertain" and to apply "strong-arm tactics against any individual or collective attempt" (ACS, Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ris. (1922-1943), phase. 242/R, "Aldo Vidussoni"). See R. Covino, G. Gallo, and E. Mantovani, "L'industria dall'economia di guerra alla ricostruzione" [Industry from the war economy to reconstruction], in L'economia italiana nel periodo fascista [The Italian economy during the Fascist period], edited by P. Ciocca and G. Toniolo, Bologna 1976, p. 188. These responsibilities were suffered by most of the too many bodies that were supposed to preside over the war effort, coordinate and rationalize its mechanisms, avoid bureaucratic and interest overlaps, and combat inefficiencies, waste, and corruption; by a crescendo of compromises between private interests and state powers and by a progressive sclerosis and psychological and even moral demotivation of a large part of the latter, which often resulted in an inability to encourage and support the efforts and initiatives that, even in this situation, were expressed by sectors of society and the economy (especially the public and 'minor', 'spontaneous' sectors, almost a foreshadowing, with all due differences, of the 'underground' economy of our days), which were the most motivated and rich in energy, ideas, and skills. The consequences of this complex set of interrelated facts were manifold and, in some cases, continued to be felt even after the end of the conflict. In the 1950s, they had a greater influence than is generally believed and than was sometimes led to be believed on the so-called 'economic miracle." For the sake of brevity, however, we will focus on only two of them, which we believe to be the most important for the purposes of our discussion. The first concerns the nature of economic development between 1940 and 1942-43 and its impact on Italy's war potential. To boil the issue down to its essence, the point to be emphasized in this regard seems to us to be the following. According to a well-

known estimate by Saraceno, in 1938 the production system was used at only about 80 percent of its capacity. During the war years, some of its essential sectors experienced growth, sometimes even significant growth. However, rather than "coordinated development," it was more a case of "more or less organic growth' that, while it increased production, very often did not translate into a greater and more rational use of existing potential, but was the result of the emergence of new companies (generally small and medium-sized) and new departments. A typical example is the mechanical industry, which recorded the highest increase. Saraceno wrote about it:: In some sectors, the needs of the war hastened the evolution, not yet perfected, from semi-artisan to truly industrial manufacturing, promoting the coordination of different companies in both design and execution. In these cases, this transformation was accompanied by a more rational exploitation of available capacity. In most sectors, however, this rationalization could not take place for various reasons, including: the scarcity of available resources; the structure of the industry, consisting mainly of small and medium-sized companies; the widespread impression at thethe beginning of the war, that the required production would not continue over time and that, rather than transforming the equipment for new processes, it was better to leave the existing equipment intact and add new departments dedicated to specific war orders. Not to mention the many plants whose construction had begun before the war or was undertaken after it started and which became operational or reached their maximum production capacity only when the lack of raw materials and the events of the war no longer allowed their use or made them uneconomical overall. This brings us to the second of the two consequences that we are most interested in highlighting, which helps to explain, as far as the economic field is concerned, why Italy, despite the far from insignificant efforts that were made to develop the economic apparatus and make it more adequate to sustain the war effort, found itself unable to achieve complete mobilization of available resources and equipment. As Romeo1 has pointed out, evidence of this is already evident from a comparison of consumption trends during the First and Second World Wars. During the First World War, consumption "greatly exceeded national income, leading to a reduction in the country's pre-existing wealth"; from 1939 to 1942, however, Italy "did not experience such events, with income continuing to exceed consumption, allowing for average savings (at constant prices) of 6.8 percent, which fell to negative values, albeit modest, 'only in the following three years, dominated by the events of defeat, the division of the country in two, and the war fought on national territory'. Despite the enormous financial effort and the strain placed on the entire national economic system, the increase in public consumption (due essentially to military consumption, which, at constant prices, rose from 8.19 billion in 1939 to 25.58 billion in 1943) never reached the maximum levels achieved in 1915-18. This "is further proof of the inability to mobilize all the country's resources that characterizes... Italy's conduct of the Second World War." See R. romeo, Breve storia della grande industria in Italia cit., pp. 195 ff. Another significant indicator is gross investment by type of asset and sector of use. These too1 show that economic mobilization was never total during the war years. This being the case, it is not surprising that Rome, pressed as it wasby daily needs, was forced to make continuous appeals to the Germans to obtain the raw materials and war material it desperately needed, but which Berlin (which, as we shall see, preferred, if

anything, to intervene in case of need with its own units) granted sparingly, almost never in the agreed quantities and on such onerous terms that they increasingly reduced Rome's autonomy and room for maneuver, increased its economic and political dependence on Germany, and made increasingly evident the profound contradiction between the image of Fascist Italy promoted by the regime, in which most Italians and, to a certain extent, even Germans had believed, and the actual reality. Mussolini's decision to intervene was made with a view, in Minniti's words, to a war that would be "so rapid in time 1 See Economic Development in Italy, op. cit., III, p. 451: data, at 1938 prices and in billions, compiled by O. Vitali: but immobile on the ground', i.e., a war effort limited to the maximum in terms of time and commitment required of both the armed forces and the country and, therefore, such that it could be sustained even with a reduced economic, industrial, and military apparatus. From this perspective, even the objectives that the 'Duce' had set himself were relatively 'modest', less ambitious than those cherished by the military, by part of Palazzo Chigi and, above all, by the Ministry of Italian Africa. This is not to say, let us be clear, that his imperial ambitions were more modest; what held him back from embracing the more extreme ones was the awareness that the victory of the Axis, inevitably exalting the role and hegemonic pretensions of Berlin, would have made Italian-German relations more difficult and unbalanced. Hence the need, especially after the hope of assuming the role of 'great mediator' of peace had proved fallacious, to stick to a strategy that, on the one hand, wore down Italy as little as possible militarily and economically, thus allowing it, in anticipation of the difficulties that would arise in the postwar period, not to deviate substantially from what Minniti called the model of "war in preparation" and, on the other hand, highlighting its "moderation," laying the foundations for making Italy the post-war reference point and gathering place for all European countries interested in containing German hegemony. Even in the face of the conflict's prolongation and extension beyond all his expectations, Mussolini had tried to deviate as little as possible from this strategy. All in all, it is not wrong to say that as the prospect of a rapid end to the war faded, it became not only increasingly challenging for Italy, but also increasingly unfavorable, and that he was unable to convince Hitler of the centrality anddecisive importance of the Mediterranean theater, did not lead him to think more about tomorrow than today, more about relations with Germany after victory than about the need to make every possible effort at that moment to contribute to victory, mobilizing all possible energy and intervening resolutely to increase and rationalize Italy's war effort to the maximum. After July 25 and even more so after the end of the war, numerous supporters and nostalgics of Mussolini argued that the "Duce" was unaware, that he had been deliberately kept in the dark about the real situation, the shortcomings and inefficiencies of the industrial organization and the armed forces. Along these lines, there were those who fantasized about a betrayal of which the "Duce" was the victim. This thesis must be rejected outright. As has already been said, and as is demonstrated by extensive documentation, Mussolini had an overview of the situation, which was not complete but certainly allowed him, in theory, to make a realistic assessment of it. If he did not draw the logical conclusions or drew them only after a long delay, it was due to a series of limitations and errors of his own. First of all, there was his lack of sufficient economic and military preparation, which, of course, was not unique to him, but which, compared to that of other

great political leaders of the Second World War, was aggravated, on the one hand, by the fact that he remained anchored (despite some insights that were far from trivial but remained virtually unheeded) to an image of war and its problems that was largely that which had been formed in 1914-18; on the other hand, by having "a kind of aversion to technical problems, and, although he understood them perfectly at the time, he did not assimilate them and often forgot them altogether"; and, on yet another hand, by his lack of confidence in a significant part of the secondary theater of war, so much so that M. Shulmann, Defeat in the West, London 1947, pp. 54 ff., speaking of Hitler's strategy, defined the attack on the USSR as his greatest mistake, the entry into war against the US as the decisive one, and his failure to appreciate the importance of the Mediterranean as the final one. For the positions of Hitler, the OKW, and the Navy with regard to the Mediterranean, see, in addition to the aforementioned A. Hillgruber, Hitler's Military Strategy, passim, K. Assmann, Anni fatali per la Germania cit., pp. 241 ff. The quotation is taken from a private letter from General Francesco Pricolo to General Emilio Faldella dated January 12, 1960, commenting on the latter's book on Italy in World War II, preserved at the AUSSMA, Carte Pricolo, b. 1. The same letter recounts the following very telling episode: "Just think that after a year of war, when Mussolini had heard talk of different types of aircraft almost daily, when he had seen so many planes at airports and in flight, returning in thesummer of 1941 from Rocca delle Camminate, he expressed his satisfaction at having seen our best fighter plane, built by a branch of Caproni in Predappio, on the Fori field! 'They asked me to suggest a name for theaircraft," he told me, "and I said to call it Ca-preca, meaning fighter, Predappio, Caproni." It was, in fact, a new small tourist aircraft that, due to its excellent maneuverability, could have been distributed to primary schools for acrobatic flights (Ca 160, if I remember correctly). When I explained how things stood, he was very upset. That is why it is not surprising that he did not follow and did not even remember the various stages of the technical problems' that he should have relied on and which in some cases involved men of considerable ability. This led to an accentuation (also favored by the fact that many of his collaborators, in order to 'cover their backs' instead of acting concretely on the basis of their convictions and needs, inundated him with memos) of his already strong tendency, rather than to delegate, to centralize in his own person a vast series of tasks and decisions (many of which were secondary and therefore wasted his time and, worse still, prevented him from having a synthetic and realistic view of the situation) for which he very often lacked adequate preparation, so that he often ended up making (or, sometimes, not making) his decisions under the influence of more or less occasional influences or momentary moods, or rather out of necessity and contingent deadlines. Added to this was another tendency, also very strong in him: that of considering all issues, even the most purely technical, economic, and military ones, essentially as something incidental, dependent on politics and resolvable in political terms, and of considering himself, in this respect, the politician par excellence, superior to all, able to grasp the political essence of every issue and resolve it politically. Typical in this sense was the decision, apparently at odds with his conviction that Italy should limit its war effort as much as possible and focus everything on bringing the conflict to a swift conclusion, to attack Greece. Finally, we cannot underestimate the fact that, contrary to what he was saying in public, Mussolini was well

aware that Italy was unprepared for a real conflict, not only economically and militarily, but also morally. Except for limited sectors, especially among young people, the enthusiasm that had accompanied the intervention was largely a consequence of the belief that with the collapse of France and the expulsion of the British from the continent, the war was practically over and that Italy could therefore reap the benefits of Germany's victory with virtually no sacrifice. The prolongation of the conflict and, above all, the repercussions on the state ofthe country's morale following the defeats in Greece and North Africa soon revealed the true nature of this enthusiasm, convincing Mussolini (as already mentioned, an idea that had been maturing for some time) that Italians were not morally up to the task they were facing. "The Italians of 1914," he had said to Ciano at the end of December 1940, "were better than those of today. It is not a good result for the regime, but that is how it is." Six months later, he was even more pessimistic: "I have little faith in our race: at the first bombing that destroys a famous bell tower or a painting by Giotto, Italians will be seized by a crisis of artistic sentimentality and raise their arms." For the time being, and especially as far as the masses were concerned, these "deficiencies" of the Italians, although deeply disappointing and irritating him, did not worry him too much. As already mentioned, for Mussolini, the mood of the masses was closely linked to the ups and downs of military operations and, above all, to the prospects for the final outcome of the conflict; thus, as long as he believed in ultimate victory, it worried him relatively little and was less important to him than other problems, easier to keep under control with the normal preventive and repressive tools available to the regime and those already tried and tested during the First World War. Much more serious in his eyes were the 'lack of character' and the real or perceived shortcomings of the military, the economic and business world, large sections of the bourgeoisie, and the political class itself, which he considered to be the real and, at least, the main culprits for everything that was not going as he would have liked (including the attitude of the masses) and which, with few exceptions, he could not wait to 'bring into line' and in many cases simply liquidate. A characteristic statement of his, made on July 5, 1941, in the Council of Ministers: The wealthy classes in general, with a few commendable exceptions, have given the regime purely formal support, and their ideal is, and always will be, money. I am firmly determined to go all the way in this knife fight, without looking anyone in the face. At the end of the war, the revolution will have to achieve all the goals I have set for it set for it, even those that I was unable to achieve in 1922 and which have not been abandoned but simply set aside. With these circles, Mussolini, wanted to avoid any real show of strength while the war was still going on. His behavior in the face of the conflict that arose between the public and private steel industries is significant in this regard. Since 1936-37, Tiri (initially facing various internal resistance, including that of his vice president and then president Francesco Giordani, who supported the location of new plants in the South and scrap steel production, which he considered more convenient than the integrated cycle) and, in particular, Finsider, and above all Agostino Rocca, certainly the most knowledgeable Italian technician with the clearest ideas in this field, had been working to implement a process of rationalization, renewal, and concentration of the steel industry that would prevent the creation of new private plants in contrast to the 'autarkic plan' set out by Oscar Sinigaglia and based on the integrated cycle. The strengths of the operation were to

be the expansion of the Piombino and Bagnoli centers and the construction of a new large center in Genoa Cornigliano, all of which were, integrated cycle. Thanks to this, crude steel production was expected to increase from just over two million tons in 1936 to two and a half million in 1940 and to four and a half million when the Cornigliano center became operational. In reality, production never exceeded the 2,320,000 tons of 1938 and even decreased progressivelyin the following years: 2,283,438 in 1939, 2,257,783 in 1940, 2,062,583 in 1941, and 1,933,675 in 1942. The new Cornigliano plant, completed in early 1943, would not be able to come into operation due to the scarcity of raw materials and Allied aerial bombardments. However, there were other reasons as well. The "first stone" of Cornigliano had only been laid on May 14, 1938, work had only actually begun in the following September, and the entire IRI steel program had had to despite Rocca's efforts, had to proceed extremely slowly and with all kinds of delays due to resistance and maneuvers at all levels by private industry, which was divided into two groups, one comprising about thirty small and medium-sized companies, the other comprising the major companies: Falck, Breda, and Fiat, which from the outset had judged Sinigaglia and Rocca's proposals to be contrary to their interests. The story of steel policy is of interest to our discussion for at least two reasons. On the one hand, it confirms the validity of the "Minniti modelmodel': it shows that even in 1938 and the first half of 1939, the state industry and, therefore, the political powers that be were not concerned with creating a 'war economy' more or less based on the German model, but with operating with a longer-term perspective which, according to the authoritative testimony of General Dallolio, was not aimed at 'prepare for war', but rather to 'prepare for war', 'the supreme right and supreme duty of all citizens, and one of the best guarantees of peace." He confirms its validity not only for the period prior to June 1, 1940, but also for quite some time afterward. The outbreak of war and the prospect of possible Italian intervention in the near future did, in fact, bring about a change in attitude among the military hierarchy, and first and foremost among General Favagrossa (who until then had been in favor of Rocca's line and now preferred the private solution to the public one) interested in a level of production that was certainly lower than that which could have been ensured, once completed, by the modernization undertaken by public industry, but higher than that currently in place and achievable in a shorter time frame, did not induce the political powers to review their basic strategy, nor did participation in the conflict. Instead, they only adopted a more flexible attitude towards the renewed and stronger pressure and resistance ofprivate industry and, in particular, to favor a sort of compromise between the public and private sectors. On the other hand, the steel industry affair (but the same could be said in fairly similar terms for other sectors, starting with the mechanical sector) clearly highlights how Mussolini, despite being convinced of the reasons for public industry and gradually becoming increasingly dissatisfied and irritated withattitude of the private sector, never took an explicit position in favor of the former between 1940 and 1943. This was despite the fact that he could not fail to realize that, by acting in this way, he was weakening or, at least risked weakening the relationship that the regime and he personally had established with those new groups of technicians, managers, and bureaucrats who, especially since the early 1930s, had gradually grown stronger and, at the same time, integrated themselves into the regime and its

apparatus of power (partly out of conviction, partly opportunism, but largely because they saw it as the appropriate and necessary political force to curb and, in the long term, reduce the power of the old industrial and financial oligarchy, which was essentially interested only in protecting its own interests and avoiding risks and state interference as much as possible); and this even though, given the state of war, he could have justified his intervention with the particular circumstances of the moment and the need to sacrifice victory. Only in late 1942, when the difficulties of the Italian economy had become very serious and production was more or less in crisis in all sectors, did Mussolini, hoping to still be able to cope with the situation to some extent and, in particular, that it was still possible to make a supreme effort to concentrate the available resources and energies to the maximum in order to increase war production, especially in the aeronautical sector, he was led to consider the appointment of a sort of "dictator of the economy," chosen solely on the basis of his technical expertise and energy. And, to begin with, he wanted to entrust the supervision of the aeronautical sector to Vittorio Cini, who, declined the offer, claiming that he did not have the technical expertise necessary to "meet your expectations and the particular, pressing needs of the moment" and making it clear that he did not like the idea of having to sit on a technical committee alongside the Germans in that capacity. It is from these facts and Mussolini's convictions, and not from his alleged misinformation about the real Italian economic and military situation, that we must start in order to understand the behavior of the "Duce" and, in particular, his continuing to think and, essentially, acting in accordance with the logic of a "parallel" and "preparatory" war even after the resounding reversals of late 1940 and early 1941, and even more significantly, for many months after he had to convince himself that the war would be long, hard, and extremely demanding. It has been said that Mussolini came to this conclusion at the end of 1941, when Japan and the United States entered the war, and he became increasingly convinced of it as, in the following months, the progress of operations on the Eastern Front made it clear that it was highly unlikely that the Germans would defeat theUSSR in 1942 and probably not even in 1943. However, it took Rommel's defeat in Egypt to convince him that Italy needed to make the greatest possible commitment and effort in all fields and at all levels. so that, in the final analysis, it is no exaggeration to say that until the second half of 1942 he did not give up considering his participation in the conflict more in terms of a 'war in preparation' than a 'war being fought'. It is significant in this regard that as early as November 1941, he wrote to Hitler stating the need for Italy "to make a greater effort" in order to "participate with greater forces in the war operations" and asked him for the raw materials to adequately exploit (and not only at 40-60 percent of its potential) Italian industrial equipment.Italian industrial equipment, but despite his requests and despite having to acknowledge that without a decisive change of course, efforts to strengthen the armed forces could not produce concrete results, he did not try to bring some order and discipline to the mechanism and bodies responsible for production and did not take effective measures to remove some of the defects and obstacles that most affected production. measures which, if taken promptly, could have at least allowed for better use of the available facilities and raw materials and improved the quality of production. For one thing is certain: in 1940-41 and again, in some sectors, at the beginning of 1942, industrial production was lower

(significantly lower in some cases) than it could have been, not only and not so much because of the scarcity of raw materials, but because of the defects in its organization, the dysfunctions, the inefficiency, thetechnical and moral inadequacy of the bodies responsible for it, and the prevalence of particular interests. Among the various testimonies that could be cited, Agostino Rocca, then CEO of Ansaldo, summed up the situation in which industry found itself and its present and past ills to Marshal Oraziani in 1943: Italian industry, like other sectors of national life, is accustomed to a regime of profound indiscipline. (The institutions of Fascism should and could have provided a strict and rational discipline that would have allowed for progress in the economic and social spheres, but bureaucracy, individuals, and organizations have all contributed to preventing the effective implementation and functioning of the entire system). A habit has been created of acting without seriousness, of quibbling over every order, of resorting subtly to higher authorities to modify or circumvent the instructions received: in a word, a way has been found to legally do as one pleases, rather than acting in the general interest. For this reason, nothing serious could be done in the field of production rationalization, industrial concentrations or groupings,centralization of command, the pooling of patents and processes, the transfer of machinery or technicians from one plant to another, etc., provisions that also affected those intended for railways and heating) and resorting to a whole series of demolitions to recover 65,000 tons of steel materials and 65,000 tons of copper alloys, the First Department of the Supreme Command presenteda report (see Appendix, Document No. 8) on the results of the program approved six months earlier, which leaves no doubt on the matter (see Historical Diary of the Supreme Command, March 4-8, 1942, Annex No. 1). The crucial sector of imports, for example, was burdened by a jumble of rules and jurisdictions (five to seven administrations had to give their approval), which almost always made purchases impossible that greater freedom of maneuver would have allowed. Imports of raw materials, essential industrial products, and foodstuffs were, on the one hand, almost entirely agreed upon at the political-diplomatic level with the various states concerned, without the Supreme Command having any say in the matter. On the other hand, they were devolved to some forty organizations that had a virtual monopoly on them and that in most cases were actual commercial companies which, as stated in a note "reserved for the person" of Cavallero dated July 4, 1941, in view of the establishment of the Supreme Command of a "war potential department") acted "almost without any control" and were "slaves to [particular] interests and devoted to speculation" (see Cavallero's diary, July 1941, Attachments). acs, RSI, Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ris., b. 15, fase. 70, "Ansaldo Soc. An.", A. Rocca to R. Oraziani, November 6, 1943. which were, on the contrary, the special characteristic of the war production of all the belligerent countries, as preliminary conditions for its success. This lack of discipline, encouraged by the uncertainty and incredible changeability of the plans of the General Staff and the Merchant Navy, and especially by the lack of authority due to the incompetence and unpreparedness of the production command bodies, was the main cause of the insufficiency of our armaments and the ruinous crises that ensued for our country. We were unable to make rational use of all the raw materials available (both domestic and those made available by the Allies), which were absolutely insufficient for our war needs. Only by clearly understanding Mussolini's

political and psychological attitude can we truly comprehend the reasons for his passivity on a series of issues that could have been addressed and, at least in part, resolved (but which Mussolini thought he would resolve after victory, when his prestige and authority would be such as to allow him any initiative, and which, in certain cases, he did not want to address at that time in order to avoid resistance and discontent, not to cause 'scandals' and not to depress national morale and his own prestige and that of the regime) and with them the reasons for some of his important political choices in 1941-42, as well as his management of relations with Germany and, therefore, their evolution under a series of pressures and counter-pressures that are often explained only by the 'hegemony' and 'brutality' of the Germans, without considering or, in any case, underestimating (or attributing them to the 'instability' of the 'Duce's' character) the errors and ambiguities of Rome and, above all, of Mussolini. It is worth repeating that the fundamental error was certainly that of continuing to think in terms of a short and 'parallel' war and therefore to continue to consider the economic model of 'war in preparation' valid even after the prospect of a war lasting a few weeks or months without demanding offensive operations on the part of Italy had turned into the more vague and elusive prospect of a 'short' war, but one whose brevity now appeared to be conditioned, rather than by a favorable evolution towards a compromise peace in the balance of powerwithin the British ruling class, but by the Axis's ability to force Britain to give up the fight. As far as Italy was concerned, after the attack on Greece and while it was necessary to multiply the blows to break British resistance, this war certainly could not be fought by sticking to a strategy of reduced military commitment. Insisting on considering that model still valid meant not only giving up on trying to equip the country and the armed forces as much as possible to cope with a real war, but also not making rational use of the available resources, underutilizing facilities that could have ensured greater production, postponing economic, technical, and technological choices of great importance, and, finally, not intervening even where it would have been most necessary and, to some extent, even possible to impose on industry and the bodies that acted as intermediaries with it a discipline and behavior consistent with the needs of war. The result was that a true war economy was not achieved, the deficiencies and growing needs of the armed forces were not at least partially remedied, and, moreover, an image of unpreparedness and even greater inefficiency than was actually the case, which could not fail to have a heavy impact on the morale of the country and even of the most intransigent and motivated fascists (provoking among them, as we shall see in a later chapter, a series of conflicting reactions, which in turn contributed to increasing the depression of spirits, arousing indignation, suspicion, accusations, interference, and underground struggles that aggravated the situation) and which fueled the Germans' distrust, contempt, and lack of confidence in Italy and the tendency, first, to consider any aid not strictly aimed at preventing its collapse to be useless and therefore wasted, and then to conceive of it only in the context of a relationship of direct control. From an economic point of view, the greatest effort made in 1940-43 was that imposed by the dual necessity of coping with addition to normal expenses, the exceptional costs arising from the state of war and, at the same time, to contain the budget deficit, circulation, and inflation as much as possible. Especially in the first two years (during which the situation worsened

considerably in 1942), the results achieved, thanks in part to the firmness of the governor of the Bank of Italy, Vincenzo Azzolini, were, on the whole and given relatively positive. To achieve them, a number of classic measures were taken, such as the introduction of price freezes on goods and services, salaries and wages, and rents, as well as new taxes on higher war profits, on the remuneration of directors and managers of commercial companies, and on various salaries and fees (2% on a minimum taxable annual income of more than 2,000 lire)2, and a progressive (though not always sufficient) 1 For a clear summary, see G. Rasi, La politica economica e i conti della nazione, in Annali dell'economia italiana, IX, i, Milan 1983, pp. 107 ff. 2 Direct taxes (in millions): Source: F. A. Repaci, La finanza pubblica italiana cit., pp. 392 ff., 398 ff., 419 and 421. sufficiently timely) contraction or cancellation of various budget items not immediately connected with the war effort (reclamation, public building, work for the Universal Exhibition, etc.). A contribution, albeit modest, but in the Italian economic and financial situation every item of revenue was precious, was also made by foreign trade, which remained in surplus1 and

Source: Summary of Italian historical statistics 1861-1955, p. 152. A report dated April 1944 by the Bank for International Settlements stated that, based on the information in its possession, Italian foreign trade in 1942 had exceeded pre-war levels and recorded a trade surplus. Given that a more accurate comparison with the pre-war period would have required an examination of price trends, the report nevertheless stated that, considering that German participation in Italian foreign trade must have reached 80 percent in 1942 and that most trade with Germany had been subject to price controls, the general increase in prices must have had a rather limited influence on Italian foreign trade, so that even in quantitative terms, Italian trade must have remained at a satisfactory level. Foreign trade statistics published by some countries (Hungary, Bulgaria, Sweden, etc.) showed that Italy ranked second after Germany. Trade was mainly in two directions: Italy imported dairy products (Denmark), wood pulp (Sweden and Finland), coal, minerals, and iron and steel products (Germany) from northern Europe, while exporting foodstuffs and minerals (sulfur, bauxite, mercury, etc.); from Eastern Europe, it imported oil, timber, and oilseeds, in exchange for textiles and other finished products (ITAua bank archive, Azzolini Archive, cart. 59, "Research Service," phase "Economic and financial situation in Italy (May 1944)"). According to the Central Corporate Inspectorate, from January to October 1941, the value of imported and exported goods showed a surplus of 1.283 billion. This surplus continued at least until mid-1942. The same source provides the following summary for the period January-October 1942: Imports Exports from January 1 to October 27, 1942 from remittances from workers in Germany1. According to Repaci's calculations, the revenue, expenditure, and deficit (in billions) of the state budget during the war years (until July 25, 1943) increased as follows:

In practice, tax revenues barely covered normal expenditure (which had also increased significantly due to subsidies for price supplements and public debt servicing) and their

impact on the overall budget was lower than that of other belligerent countries. And with the deficit, circulation increased sharply, from 31,306 billion in 1940 (24,432 in 1939) to 49,609 in 1941 and 64,300 on November 1, 1942. 3, and acs, Segr. pari. del Duce, Carteggio ord. (1922-1943), phase. 500.005/IV, Ministry of Corporations, Central Corporate Inspectorate. Report on the economic situation as of December 1, 1942. An important aspect of Italian foreign trade during the Second World War was its relationship with Switzerland which, together with, but even more so than, Spain and Portugal, constituted, in Ciano's words, a 'tiny lung' from which 'besieged' Europe, and Italy in particular, could draw a little raw material and finished products. 'Even today, Ciano wrote to Alfieri on January 4, 1942, recommending that he intervene so that the Germans would not put too much pressure on Switzerland and provoke Anglo-American reactions that would cause the Axis to lose the advantages of continuing to give special consideration to Swiss trade. Most Swiss factories work for the Axis, and Switzerland is "our only banker who still provides us with a little gold to buy raw materials for our war industries" (ddi, s. IX, Vili, p. 102). For preliminary information, see H. Homberger, La politique commerciale de la Suisse durant la Deuxième Guerre mondiale cit., in particular pp. 67 ff., 76. There is a lack of significant data on the amount of remittances sent by workers in Germany. The BRI report cited in the previous note explicitly refers to these remittances as one of the reasons for the increase in German debt to Italy. According to the most reliable figures, the maximum number of Italian workers in Germany was 95,000 in 1940, 233,000 in 1941, 212,000 in 1942, and 161,000 in 1943 (May). A reference point for assessing the extent of remittances is provided by a note from the Foreign Ministry to Mussolini dated February 23, 1943 (ASMAE, Coordination Office, b. 36, phase 1, "Germany" (1943)). It estimated that "as a result of the gradual reduction in the number of workers in Germany" (with 12,000 expected to return each month in April), remittances for 1943 would not exceed 1.5 billion lire. F. A. Repaci, La finanza pubblica italiana cit., pp. 323 and 331. See Bank of Italy archives, Azzolini Archive, cart. 4, "Correspondence between the Governor and the Head of Government Mussolini," phase. 1942, Azzolini to Mussolini, November 17, 1942. In communicating these figures, Azzolini wrote: "The Bank has so far met the needs arising from the progressive increase described above not only by absorbing the entire production, but also by drawing gradually on the reserves which, with a prudent assessment of foreseeable future requirements, it had built up in the past when the pace of production in relation to the limited circulation had allowed it. The stocks have thus gradually dwindled until, in recent times, due to the rapid and remarkable surge in circulation, they have been exhausted. Therefore, the only way to deal with the situation is through production, and the maximum possible impetus has been given to this by making full use of the machinery that, in the recent past, with foresight, was purchased with a view to the cost of living. We will dwell on this last aspect in a future chapter, so here it is sufficient to limit ourselves to two overall figures: that relating to the wholesale price index, which rose from 5.050 in December 1939 to 5.893, 6.574, and 7.386 in December 1940, 1941, and 1942, and the cost of living, which rose from 4.539 to 5.297, 6.129, and 7.084^ The budget deficit was covered (in addition to some recoveries) mainly by resorting to medium- and long-term credit and an increase in liabilities (including floating debt and residual liabilities). In three years, recourse to loans (on terms that were

increasingly advantageous for subscribers) fluctuated between 100 and 1 billion lire. With regard to the financing of the war more directly, the following "Indications, by way of a broad approximation, of the contribution of Italian credit institutions to the financing of the war," drawn up by the Bank of Italy in early 1943 and referring to the situation as of July 31, 1942 (with some additions in December), are illuminating. This document shows that the percentage of savings collected by banks and used directly to finance the war was at least 60 percent: Only the main credit institutions (with assets exceeding 200 million) are considered, which, as of July 31, collected a total of 98,454 million in deposits (including correspondent accounts). Also as of July 31: The same companies held government securities, various bonds and land registers, and shares worth 44,732 million, of which 38,042 million were securities issued directly by the STATE. Also as of July 31: The same companies held 7,376 million in interest-bearing current accounts with the Treasury. In anticipation of future needs, I had double shifts and Sunday work introduced at the L'Aquila workshops. Production has thus intensified to such an extent that in the past week it has yielded 2,676,500 pieces for approximately half a billion lire, and since October 23, it has made it possible to supply the branches with 1,400,000,000 lire. I expect to be able to achieve greater production, but it is clear that there is a natural limit to human and technical possibilities. However, with the rate of production that can be achieved, I hope to be able to cope with the situation, provided that it tends to improve or at least remain stable. In the meantime, it would be useful if the decree allowing the Bank of Italy to make payments for Treasury expenses by crediting accounts or by money order were published as soon as possible. See F. A. Repaci, La finanza pubblica italiana cit., p. 471. Bank of Italy archive, Azzolini Archive, cart. 50, 'Special Coordination Office', phase. 'Loans granted by banks for military works and supplies'. Also as of July 31: loans to the war industry of the aforementioned companies, with or without credit transfer, amounted to 865 million.

War industries 865 (July 31) Also as of July 31: Overall, these figures, which are clearly incomplete, give b + c + d 56,283 million in savings immediately directed by the companies in question to the financing of the war. 3 V3/ / Also as of 31/vii: No data is available on investments in government-guaranteed securities and war industry bonds. Investments in IMI AND CREDIOP BONDS AND CONSORTIUM INTEREST-BEARING BONDS subsidies amounted to ajjoo million. b + c + d + e Also as of 31/vii: The amount of financing for stockpiles is unknown, but by inference (total annual amount, seasonal trend, normal duration), the average amount in July can be estimated at 5-6 billion. b+c+d+e+f Again, as of July 31: Deducting the total amount of advances and accruals at the issuing institution (which also includes items not related to the operations listed) of 7,300 million, this adds up to a total of approximately 000 million. Conclusion: As of July 31, 1942, the percentage of savings collected by the credit institutions in question and used directly by them to finance the war was at least 60%. However, this figure is certainly lower than the actual amount (the total deposits include a percentage of non-genuine savings, as recourse to the issuing institution was deducted without discrimination). However precarious and inadequate it may have been, the more strictly financial aspect of the economy was, to a large extent, thanks to the greater technical expertise and sense of responsibility and the powers available to those who held the reins, which, for better or worse, held up better and longer.

The situation was worse for production, certainly in 1942 and in some sectors (first and foremost the textile sector, which had to cope with the almost total suspension of imports of cotton and raw wool, and then the food sector, which found itself in a similar, albeit less dramatic, situation) even before that. And it was not only industrial production, which was most affected by the scarcity of raw materials and energy, but also agricultural production. Vanni De Maria), in 1941 exerted a considerable influence on the financial policy of Azzolini and the Bank of Italy. Rather than following a Keynesian line, these ideas were mainly based on the concept of the so-called "capital circuit" or "monetary circuit" developed mainly by German economic culture. See G. Ravanelli, Finanziamento della guerra e "circuito dei capitali" in alcune memorie inedite, in Storia del pensiero economico, no. 18, 1989, pp. 45 ff.; as well as P. Baffi, L'evoluzione monetaria in Italia dall'economia di guerra alla convertibilità (1935-1958), in id., Studi sulla moneta, Milan 1965, pp. 225 ff.; R. Faucci, Appunti sulle istituzioni economiche del tardo fascismo (1935-1943), in "Quaderni storici," May-December 1975, pp. 607 ff. According to data from the Minister of Corporations (ACS, Segr. Part. del Duce, Carteggio Ord. (1922-1943), phase 500005/IV), mining production from 1940 to the first five months of 1943 followed this trend:

January-May (provisional data). But see also those in the Summary of Italian Historical Statistics 1861-1956, pp. 121 ff. Most of the coal production came from Arsa, in Istria, and Sulcis, in Sardinia. Although lower than the forecasts based on the results obtained in Sulcis in the years immediately preceding the war (mainly due to the impossibility of increasing the workforce first and then its decrease, and the difficulties in transport, which particularly affected the supply of armaments), production remained at relatively high levels in 1941-42, with peaks of 100,000 tons per month in Istria and even higher in Sardinia (see A. Vacca, Carbonia e i problemi dell'industria carbonifera sarda (1936-1976), Cagliari 1985, pp. 19 ff.; M. Carta, Carbònia: realtà da 50 anni, Nuoro 1986, pp. 63 ff.). The Summary of Italian Historical Statistics 1861-1956, p. 135, shows that electricity production, albeit with fluctuations and different trends depending on the hydrological and agricultural conditions and types of crops, overall agricultural production declined year after year, mainly due to the reduced availability of fertilizers (which had to be imported in part and were sacrificed in part in favor of the war industry) and agricultural labor (due to conscription). Its index, which stood at 98 in 1940, fell to 75.6 in 1943. The situation is more complex when it comes to industrial production. In this regard, it is necessary to make a series of distinctions between the various sectors, between public enterprises (even before the war, IRI controlled almost 70 percent of potential arms production and, at the end of 1942, 31 percent of shipbuilding and mechanical engineering, 29% of steel, chemical, and mining production, and 21% of In addition to domestic production, there were 252 million kvh of imports in 1940, 232 million in 1941, and 247 million in 1942 (see Italian Statistical Yearbook 1944-1948, p. 232). Agricultural and livestock production (in thousands of quintals).

Source: Italian Statistical Yearbook 1944-1948, pp. 17 8 ff. 2 0 2 and 2 3 5. For a clear summary, see M. Toscano, Agricoltura, in Annali dell'economia italiana cit., IX, 2, pp. 13 ff. For a clear summary, see F. Minniti, Industria e artigianato, in Annali dell'economia italiana cit., IX, 2, pp. 81 ff. hundred of the electricity and telephone sector and 16 percent of the shipping sector) and private companies, and among the latter, based on their importance and types of production, as well as between the first two years of Italy's participation in the conflict and the subsequent period. Viewed as a whole, production trends were almost immediately affected by the objective limitations of the situation: its index, which had been 109 in 1939, rose by one point in 1940, but then began to fall irretrievably: to 103 in 1941, to 89 in 1942, and then to 69 in 1943. However, the index for IRI companies (UVA, Terni, Siac, Dalmine) companies, however, rose steadily: 184 in 1940, 228 in 1941, and 264 in 1942. As indicative as these figures may be, it is necessary to bear in mind that, as Romeo pointed out, this trend reflects to a very significant extent the actual development of production in the various sectors, which varied considerably, especially in relation to their different importance for the war effort war effort, the availability of raw materials or synthetic products, etc. Despite all the difficulties and shortcomings mentioned above, the production and organizational efforts were, as we have already anticipated,far from insignificant and, at least initially, sufficient to cope with the situation to some extent. In the energy and mining sector, new deposits were identified and exploited (especially methane, but also mica) and the exploitation of old mines was resumed. Considerable efforts were also made in the field of synthetic production (such as rubber) and substitutes. Although this was at the expense of chemical fertilizer production, the demand for explosives was adequately met. Similarly, at the expense of civilian production, the first two years saw an increase in the production of military and industrial vehicles. The results achieved by the mechanical sector were also remarkable, so much so that, according to Romeo, "it can be assumed that the production capacity of the mechanical industry, including that of armaments, was twice that of the pre-war period in 1943." Less remarkable, but still decisive for war production (even if sufficient to cover only 75 percent of the expected demand), were the results achieved in the steel industry. The production of crude steel fell from 2,257,783 tons in 1940 to 2,062,583 in 1941 and 1,933,675 in 1942. "However, combined with other secondary production and net imports of such materials, which rose from 43,200 tons in 1940 to 1,034,000 in 1942, it made it possible to increase the availability of steel products from 2,722,000 tons in 1940 to about 3 million in the following two years." Together with the delay in completely abandoning the model of "war in preparation," the Italian economy was brought to its knees by the growing scarcity (and often poor use) of raw materials, energy, and, from a certain point onwards (in practice from mid-1942), even labor, and not only skilled labor. A true labor service that would mobilize and rationally utilize all available forces was never really achieved, and what was done in this direction in the last months before July 25, 1943, was little and ineffective, despite precise invitations to Mussolini to act in this sense from both German and Italian sides[3] and the problem was continually discussed. R. Romeo, Breve storia della grande industria in Italia, op. cit., pp. 203 ff. Steel allocations to various production activities amounted to approximately 1,800,000 tons in both 1941 and 1942. Most of this went to the

armed forces (870,000 -1,050,000 tons); 290,180,000 for industrial plants, 175,200,000 for transport and communications, 96,50,000 for electrical works; only 48-36,000 tons were allocated toagriculture was allocated only 48-36,000 tons and even less to public works: 48,000 in 1941 and 24,000 in 1942. At a meeting held on January 27, 1943, at Cavallero to discuss the "strengthening of the Armed Forces,", General Favaerossa stated in no uncertain terms that "there is not enough personnel to use a million tons of steel in 16 months" (u. cavallero, Diario cit., p. 711). A typical testimony to the situation in this regard is a "note for the Duce" dated September 22, 1942, from the Undersecretary for Corporations Lombrassa (acs, Segr. part. del Duce, Carteggio ord. (1922-1943), fase. 500005/III). It reads: "Given that the shortage of labor for war tasks is the sore point of all the belligerent countries, which are seeking to remedy a situation that could have a decisive impact on production with drastic measures, which are reported daily, and recognizing that Italy, due to its lower level of industrial development and the fact that it has always been a country with a surplus of labor, has so far suffered less from this crisis to date, it must be recognized that, from now on, the labor situation will tend to become increasingly difficult and worsen to the point of deviating significantly from actual production needs. Industry is asking, agriculture is asking, public works are asking, Germany is asking: who will respond? The Labor Service is undoubtedly the appropriate institution to remedy the labor crisis or to reduce it to proportions that are not substantially detrimental to production. But in order for the Labor Service to achieve absolute discipline and distribution of labor, there must be a single effective command of all real and hypothetical, normal and exceptional, professional and extra-professional labor potential; a single command that has the necessary autonomy and authority, as well as the necessary tools to act decisively and promptly in the production cycle andeconomy of the country at war with which it is closely associated. It does not seem possible to resort to the Labor Service as an extra ratio, as is currently the case, when the normal placement procedure has not yielded appreciable results, and to hope, by applying it in a fragmented and sporadic manner, i.e., outside of a pre-established organic plan, for miraculous remedies which, in daily practice, take on theappearance of excessive taxation or abuse against certain workers or categories of workers. In my opinion, the two terms of the problem are: the formulation and application of a comprehensive program of production needs according to their criteria of priority or hierarchy, dictated by the war; maneuvering, on a national level, and according to the concept of compulsory labor without distinction of age, sex, social class, of all the potential labor to obey those needs and to satisfy them, implementing a true mobilization of Italian labor which, with the disappearance of unemployment, neutralizes the liberal and Marxist regime of supply and demand that seeks to evade Fascist laws and morals with a dangerous rush to high clandestine wages and therefore to inflation. While I have the honor of submitting these considerations to you with the sole intention of enabling me to fulfill the task you have entrusted to me, I must assure you that in the meantime, with the limited means at my disposal, I am continuing and will continue to take action to direct the workforce towards the most important sectors, first and foremost the mining industry, which has a direct relationship between the workforce employed and production. At the same time, I have already arranged a comprehensive plan for the employment and distribution of labor in

agriculture at the Supreme Command), Allied aerial bombardments, which became increasingly heavy in the second half of 1942, even when they did not target or hit factories, disrupted work and made it increasingly difficult to supply raw materials to industries and to distribute production (according to General Favagrossa's estimates, Allied raids caused a 20 percent reduction in production in November-December 1942; "Turin," Mussolini stated on December 29 during a meeting dedicated to strengthening the armed forces, "has lost 50 percent of its industrial efficiency"1), and the bureaucratic sclerosis of many central and peripheral bodies that were supposed to oversee it and promote its smoother and more rational functioning2. Without going into too much detail, suffice it to say that at the end of June 1942, of the 8,340 factories regularly surveyed by the Central Corporate Inspectorate 1899 (1,052 of which were textile factories) were inactive. The same source3 shows that in the above-mentioned factories, production in the first half of 1942 compared with that of the same period in 1941 revealed a decrease of no more than 1 percent for rolled products,steel, looms, vehicle bodies, and pasta; between 15 and 33 percent for cast iron, cement, pyric powders and explosives, sulfuric acid, nitrogen fertilizers, artificial textile fibers, mechanical wood pulp, cellulose, paper, and cardboard; and even more than 33 percent for copper sulfate, superphosphates, treated natural silk, and broom fibers. Finally, there were considerable stocks of both finished products and fossil fuels at the factories, which clearly demonstrates the deterioration of the overall situation. During the same period, while in Rome there was talk of increasing working hours to at least 50 per week (and some of the available and usable workforce. In addition to the military and women, 100,000 organized members of the Gii and prisoners of war will be employed. According to a criterion of gradualism, after mining and agriculture, plans will be implemented to adjust the allocation of labor to other industries that need it, including hydroelectric power. However, if the Labor Service is to be called upon to perform the broader and more delicate task of regulating and directing the distribution and allocation of workers in all productive sectors, making the most of every single capacity, skills, and energy, it seems necessary to me that the new institution, in order to be able to deal with delicate situations of a political nature and control of the working masses, should have greater powers appropriate to these functions, with its own streamlined organization and the necessary resources, which it currently lacks, in order to impose on each and every one, inflexibly and without stopping at any obstacle, the observance of their duty, even in the field of labor for the supreme needs of the war." ACS, B. Mussolini, Valigia, B. I, Phase 5, "Minutes of the meeting held on January 29, 1943-XXI at Palazzo Venezia with the Duce on the subject: Strengthening of the Armed Forces," ff. 20 (Mussolini) and 39 (Fav agrossa). See U. Cavallero, Diary, p. 639 (December 30, 1942). } ACS, Segr. Pari, del Duce, Carteggio ord. (1922-1943), phase. 5 0 0 0O5/III, Ministry of Corporations, Central Corporate Inspectorate, "Industrial activity in June 1942-xx," ff. 2 ff. No, like Undersecretary Fougier, would have liked to raise it to 72 \ to resort to child labor, "we must lower the age to 13 for boys and 16 for girls," General Favagrossa would argue the following January, and also use prisoners. Of the 1,160,349 workers employed in 7,929 factories surveyed, only 404,795 worked more than 48 hours per week, 255,718 worked between 43 and 48 hours, 187,417 worked between 40 and less than 45 hours, and 312,419 worked less than 40 hours. Even the large industrial complexes on

which most of the most important production for the war effort depended were not immune to this general condition. Some "Notes on Fiat's overall performance in the first half of 1942 (6 months)", drawn up in September and attached to Cavallero's diary, offer significant insights in this regard. Overall production in 1942 was 'significantly lower' than expected and also lower than in the corresponding half of the previous year, to the extent that Fiat had had to reduce its exports, which helped to supply itsfrom 112 to 66 million. In particular, while steel production at Ferriere Fiat had increased from 70 to 72 thousand tons, that of marine engines from 59 to 129,000 horsepower, and that of motorized vehicles for the armed forces <^10172 310,588 units, there had been a decrease in the aircraft (from 45,700 to 3,600) and aircraft engines (from 1,116 to 1,086). As stated in the concluding remarks at the end of the note, 'In the first half of 1942, production was unfortunately much lower than planned and also lower, at best equal to 1941 production in almost all sectors (vehicles, engines, and aircraft), with the exception of a few areas: ship engines, tanks, special vehicles, and spare parts. = This contraction is due: in part to the well-known shortages of raw materials, consumables, energy, skilled labor, and technical designers; and partly to the crisis in indirect complementary production, which has led to a lack of deliveries from small and medium-sized subcontractors, who, unlike larger organizations, do not have the means to overcome the current difficulties. = With regard to the situation of these subcontractors-suppliers, Fabbriguerra is studying appropriate measures to avoid the suspension of the production entrusted to them: this can be achieved by allowing a greater allocation of consumables to large companies to enable them to help their sub-suppliers at crucial moments. = With regard to the other serious difficulty, that of the shortage of skilled labor, it would be appropriate to seek the highest level of intervention to obtain from the military authorities the release of personnel, including young people: skilled workers, apprentices, and designers. So far, due to the understandable resistance of the General Staff and the slowness of bureaucratic procedures, it has only been possible to recover a few dozen of the approximately 1,000 men needed for Fiat's work. = In addition, we would like to point out theabsolute necessity of two measures that Fabbriguerra is already working on: centralization in a single higher authority (Fabbriguerra) of the distribution of all raw and consumable materials necessary for the production cycles. Debureaucratization, at least with regard to large, easily controllable industrial complexes, of the complex procedures required for assignments to date. To assert that those responsible for the failure of the economy were essentially the delay in completely abandoning the model of 'war in preparation', the growing scarcity of raw materials, energy, and even labor, the poor use of these resources (which led some to wonder whether, "rather than focusing on the absolute shortage of raw materials," it might not be "more useful to direct the discussion" on the tragedy of the Italian war "towards a more rational use of the materials available") and, finally, the Anglo-American aerial bombardments is, as usual, too limiting. These four facts certainly explain a lot, but not everything. In particular, they do not explain why production in certain sectors, primarily armaments, despite all the efforts made and the undoubted results achieved (despite the great difference between its industrial structure and that of Germany, Italy made a not insignificant contribution to Axis production in certain sectors: while in the field of artillery

it produced only 10% of that produced by Germany in 1940-42, in the field of medium and heavy tanks, its contribution to the overall production of the Axis was 20.6 percent in the same period, and as for aircraft, its contribution was 23 percent in 1940 and 1941 and 15 percent in 1942), it was often quantitatively and qualitatively inferior to what it could have been or what, at first glance, one might have expected . With all the consequences that this entailed: immediate military consequences, since this 'additional' deficiency in armaments undoubtedly affected the combat capability of the armed forces and hastened their collapse, and psychological, moral, and political consequences both internally and in relations with Germany. A fairly rich collection of memoirs' deficiency in armaments undoubtedly affected the combat capability of the armed forces and hastened their collapse, and psychological, moral, and political consequences both domestically and in relations with Germany. A fairly rich collection of memoirs and some early specific studies now provide a fairly accurate picture of the main causes of this particular production deficiency. As it is impossible to go into too much detail here, we will focus only on the most relevant ones, leaving out others that we have already had occasion to mention. Rosario Romeo, in his Breve storia della grande industria italiana (A Brief History of Italian Heavy Industry), clearly highlighted one of these causes, perhaps the main one, emphasizing how Italian industry "failed... to keep pace with the overwhelming rhythm that the war had imposed on technical progress in other belligerent countries"; this led to a progressive decline in average productivity per employee (in the aeronautical industry, it fell from 66 percent in the first year of the war to 50% in the second and 31% in the third), which significantly reduced the results of the efforts made to develop production. A case in point is Ansaldo, which, in addition to ensuring, together with Fiat, almost the entire production of tanks, produced more artillery in three years than it had produced in the same period during the First World War (5,049 compared to 3,699), but using many more working hours (on average, 3,050 working hours were used in the production of oscillating masses, compared to 1,720 in 1915-17), because it was also unable to keep pace with technical progress and, therefore, the growing sophistication of this type of production. The handicap represented by the unpreparedness and inability of many industrial sectors to adapt to the technical progress taking place was largely a consequence of the underestimation of scientific research in the interwar years (with a few exceptions, such as those relating to synthetic and autarchic production in general) and, therefore, of the lack of public and private investment in it and in thethe application of its findings to production processes. With regard to the war industry in particular, however, we must not overlook the traditionalism, lack of clear ideas, and fear of making wrong choices that afflicted not only the military leadership but also a significant part of the organizations and individuals responsible for decisions regarding the design and implementation of production plans. In this regard, however, it is necessary to be very clear. These problems were not unique to the Italian armed forces (which, moreover, found themselves having to face a conflict, initially considered to be very short and limited, two or three years earlier than expected), but, to a greater or lesser extent, to all the belligerents. This applies both to the technical problems to be faced, which, as Sadkovich noted, afflicted even the United States, which was technologically much more advanced than Italy and had the largest industrial structure of all the belligerents, and to the lack of clear ideas about the

nature of the war and, therefore, the instruments of war and the characteristics of the most suitable weapons to wage it. So Sadkovich, discussing the Air Force, but the same applies to other branches of the military, rightly argued with those scholars who seem to forget this. Before 1939, in fact, he wrote, no one had a clear idea of what kind of war was about to break out. If the Italians believed in what Knox dismisses as Douhet's "crazy" theories of Douhet, the same was true of the Americans and British, even though both firmly maintain that their theories originated with the theory of strategic bombing. Italy certainly failed to decide between tactical and strategic aviation, but the same was true of the Americans, British, and Russians. The German decision to set up a tactical military aviation force does not seem a much better solution than the indecision thatthe Italian Air Force, and the lack of heavy bomber aircraft severely hampered operations over London in 1940, just as the lack of those same aircraft damagedItaly in the Mediterranean between 1940 and 1943. In short, any theory involved risks, and Knox's comments on Italy's "crazy" theories are rather unjustified. The real crux of the matter is another: what were, in some ways, the common difficulties of all the belligerents were addressed and corrected more quickly and better in other countries than in Italy, both because the industrial apparatus was better prepared and able to do so, and because those who had to understand the demands imposed by a war that was largely different from that of 1914-18, based on assumptions made in previous years, were more ready to grasp them and less tied to traditional patterns that were no longer valid (a typical example was the Italian Air Force's principle that an engine had to pass a test of 1,000 hours of uninterrupted operation before it could be adopted, which resulted in engines that were too heavy and did not take into account that the average lifespan of an aircraft in war was shorter and that, in any case, it was more advantageous from a military and economic point of view to produce lighter engines and replace them, as the Germans did, when they wore out), less afraid of making mistakes, i.e., in search of perfection, which resulted in delays and production stagnation. And this, moreover, in a situation such as that of Italy, which did not have, as England did, an ally that supplied it with massive amounts of weapons (but which, on the contrary, even secured a share of its production *) and in which the most pressing problem was the lack ofEngland, an ally that supplied it with massive amounts of armaments (but which, on the contrary, did not fail to secure a share of its production *), and in which the most pressing problem was to exploit the potential of its industry to the maximum and to equip its armed forces with as much material as possible in the shortest possible time. Even in March 1943, whenItaly was in dire need of boosting or, at least, not reducing its aircraft production, Marshal Milch argued that the Luftwaffe needed to obtain fighter sales from it (see A. S. Milvard, L'economia di guerra della Germania [Germany's War Economy], op. cit., p. 159). Among other cases that could be cited, we mention only that relating to high-speed torpedoes for torpedo bombers, which the Air Force also particularly needed and which were in short supply, produced by the Whitehead company in Fiume, to which the Germans had been placing orders even before the outbreak of the war and which Göring asked to be increased in October 1941. The story of the torpedo bombers is indicative of the technical and cultural dysfunctions and backwardness that often interfered with war production (and which the Germans did not fail to take advantage of) and is also linked to the conflicts between the Air Force and the

Navy, both of which were interested in securing a monopoly on torpedo bombers to the point of discrediting the usefulness of the weapon. However, when it became operational in the summer of 1941, it produced excellent results and convinced the Germans themselves. In September, after the attack on the Nelson, Göring told Pricolo of the superiority of the aerial torpedo over the 1,000-kilogram bomb, which had been favored by the Luftwaffe until then. For initial documentation on this subject, see Aussma, Carte Pricolo, b. 1, phase. "Visit to General Pricolo 9-1-1967," "Questione aerosiluranti"; as well as, in more nuanced terms, F. Pricolo, La Regia Aeronautica nella seconda guerra mondiale. Novembre 1939 novembre 1941, Milan 1971, pp. 114 ff. 5^1 Characteristic in this regard is the case of the. Still at the forefront until the end of the 1920s, in the following decade the "race for firsts," while making it famous throughout the world, had led to the neglect of a whole series of aspects of production, so that by 1939 it had already been largely surpassed by the British, both quantitatively and partly due to poor design capacity, partly due to technical short-sightedness, and partly lack of interest on the part of the aeronautical industries in introducing innovations and transforming production systems in terms of quality. Once it entered the war, its primary objective should have been to close or at least reduce its gap with the British. However, the results were more modest than the national industrial potential and available raw materials would normally have allowed. And not only for technical reasons. First of all, because of the particular structure of the aeronautical industry which, to use an expression of General Fougier, was in many respects 'still in its infancy' and which the ministry was unable (and in part unwilling) to to rationalize (and, therefore, develop) it, even through a process of concentration and pruning, achieved by assigning orders to the most efficient companies and not distributing them in small batches to everyone. Doing so would have resulted in considerable savings in working hours (according to Reggiane, the construction of a wing half took 1,200 hours for the first ten aircraft, 830 for the next tenand 675 for the next ten) and, therefore, in addition to lower costs, greater and faster production. On the other hand, there were the uncertainties and perfectionism of the Ministry of Aeronautics, which further delayed the production process with continuous requests for changes and improvements, which resulted in a waste of energy and resources on inconclusive projects and experiments and in new obstacles on the only path that could have led to positive results, at least in quantitative terms: that of concentrating production, as in Germany, on very few models of aircraft, engines, weapons, and various accessories. Although this situation had been so evident since 1941 that it even prompted direct intervention by Mussolini, Cavallero, and Scorza, little was done to remedy it. The minutes of the meeting held on January 29, 1943, at Mussolini's residence to examine the strengthening of the armed forces are eloquent. In the part reporting the extensive introduction that the 'Duce' devoted to the military situation and the programs under consideration for the three branches of the armed forces, the point dedicated to what had been done to rationalize and develop aircraft production reads as follows: However, production has not exceeded 300 aircraft per month. It is not true that there has been a shortage of raw materials, because Favagrossa has always provided enough for at least 350. greater results been achieved, either because industrial organization is deficient or because there is still the diabolical metaphysics of those who, by dint of modifications, remake the

airplane. There are 2,000 parts; you cannot modify them all; you achieve perfection when it is useless. The time between the presentation of the prototype and the series must be minimal and not 16-18 months. Even more eloquent is what General Fougier observed without much circumlocution in a report dedicated to the "General European Situation from the Point of View of Air Warfare" on April 55 April, General Fougier observed without too many circumlocutions in a report dedicated to the 'General European situation from the point of view of aerial warfare'. War, a ruthless revealer of all positive and negative values, wrote the Chief of Staff, has highlighted, in the long run: a) a quantitative insufficiency of material, resulting from the modest capacity of our industry, which is not prepared for large-scale production and is often oriented towards craftsmanship; deficiencies in raw materials; a marked tendency, contrary to all economic principles, towards excessive specialization and the consequent dispersion of energy; h) qualitative insufficiency of materials, resulting from limited industrial potential and even more limited technical equipment, unsuitable for sustaining the continuous race for superiority that is the main characteristic of a purely technical war, especially with regard to the air force... The Germans had always been well aware of the limitations and potential of the Italian economy, and the same can be said of the capabilities of the industrial apparatus most directly involved in war production. What disappointed, irritated, and worried them most about this aspect was not so much the greater than expected weakness and unpreparedness, but even more so the 'slowness', the'irrationality', the poor results achieved by the Italians in bringing the economy up to speed, mobilizing available energies, and correcting the errors, dysfunctions, and inefficiencies that the war had made evident. All this could not fail to affect their judgment of Italy and the Italians and their attitude towards them, but it certainly had less impact than other less obvious and, therefore, more unexpected. Since 1866, the Italian army had been viewed in Germany in generally negative terms: Italians were bad soldiers, "the general staff, the troops, the officers are all worth very little." The war in Ethiopia had, for a moment, changed this opinion, and even at the general staff level, it was thought that fascism had succeeded in creating a real army. However, the war in Spain , however, dampened this enthusiasm and also tarnished the positive image that the Air Force had enjoyed until then, thanks to the myth of Balbo, the great transatlantic flights and the many records set in international competitions, highlighting the backwardness of its tactical schemes. Nevertheless, as Petersen recalled, even in August 1938, the Wehrmacht leadership believed that, by waging a joint war against the Western powers, Italy would be able to threaten French and British spheres ofFrench and British spheres of influence in North Africa, Egypt, Palestine, and the East, conquer Corsica, attack North Africa, and eliminate Gibraltar. Similar ideas found expression in German journalism. There was talk of a "rapid and decisive strengthening of Italy" and, in the "inevitable final battle" between London and Rome, it was thought that Italy, due to its "resolve" and "operational efficiency,", had considerable chances. That Germany took Italy's desire for power seriously is demonstrated by German fears that Italy could involve Germany against its will in the war with France. In November 1937, Hitler even thought that Italy could wage war against France andEngland, attributing to it a good chance of resistance in such a case. The Navy in particular had long enjoyed high regard. According to

the Chief of Staff of the Kriegsmarine, it was capable of ousting the British from the eastern Mediterranean. Finally, as for the Air Force, the Luftwaffe was convinced that it would wage an "extremely offensive" war with "great effect."great effect'. In early August 1939, the large-scale manoeuvres carried out in the Po Valley began to undermine this optimistic assessment: General Haider, who had personally followed them in his capacity as Chief of Staff of the Wehrmacht, immediately realised that 'the tank force was still, so to speak, in its infancy' and had only a few units "with modern weaponry." Even more serious were the consequences, a few weeks later, of Mussolini's decision to declare "non-belligerence." As Albert Speer wrote, despite everything, Hitler attached great importance to Italy's war potential, but above all to that of its fleet, due to the modernity of its surface vessels and the large number of submarines, as well as to its air force, which he considered very strong. For a moment, the Führer saw his plan collapse, a plan that relied on Italy's entry into the war and the deterrent effect that this would have on the Western powers. Although the Germans could not completely rule out the possibility that there were other political reasons behind it, the reasons given by the "Duce" to justify it forced Berlin to reconsider Italy's military preparedness and capabilities. This was all the more so as von Rintelen's reports and the information coming from the numerous informants, 'even non-professional ones', that the Germans had in Italy confirmed the seriousness of the situation and the fact that, 'despite the strong commitment of the fascist government, the war preparation effort was proceeding very slowly'. Particularly striking was the fact that Pricolo, who had succeeded Valle at the beginning of November 1939 in the dual role of undersecretary and chief of staff of the Air Force, had had to drastically reconsider the actual size of the Italian air fleet, reclassify it according to more realistic criteria of use, and even order the demolition of almost nine hundred irremediably obsolete aircraft. After that, the number of aircraft actually available was considerably lower than had been previously thought and still included many aircraft that could hardly be considered modern. When Italy entered the war, the setbacks suffered in the Western Alps and the lack of initiative on the part of the Air Force and, above all, the Navy (in August, the Litiorio, the Vittorio Veneto, and the modernized Duilio had also entered service),* while it had been expected that the Italians would immediately launch anoffensive in North Africa and, in particular, occupy Malta, had further deteriorated the Germans' image and consideration of the Italian armed forces, to the point that on October 1, von Rintelen had already advised Berlin "not to leave the war south of the Alps to the Italians, because the Italian armed forces could not effectively carry out the tasks located there." The attack on Greece and the events of a few months later in North Africa, as well as the blow inflicted by the British on the Italian fleet in Taranto, had transformed the wonder and disappointment of the previous months into a dull resentment, which was seen in a real contempt, made more acute and malicious by being forced to conceal them and to continue to present, for the purposes of internal propaganda, an image of Italy that neither the military nor political leaders believed in anymore. If in the previous months attempts had been made to explain the passivity and failures of the Italians with the inefficient training of the troops, the poor preparation of the officers, thebackwardness of strategic concepts, and the excessive caution of the high command, the lack of coordination and collaboration between the various branches of the armed forces (in particular between

the Air Force and the Navy), and the shortage of modern equipment and armaments, that is, with real causes that could have been remedied to a greater or lesser extent, from the end of 1940 and especially from the beginning of 1941, the Germans' assessment of Italy's military capabilities had become drastically negative. Symptomatic in this regard is Goebbels' diary, which contains numerous notes clearly showing that underlying their assessments of various events and episodes was a deep-rooted prejudice that involved all Italians as a people ("the Italians have revealed their true colors") and had much more distant origins. Nor did the subsequent events of the conflict make this judgment any less drastic: on June 20, 1941, Goebbels noted, "we have the worst allies imaginable"; almost two years later, on April 1, 1943, he made a similar note ("our Italian allies are certainly the worst in the world!"). The impact of Italian military events on Italian-German relations was certainly greater than that of economic factors. This was because, being less predictable and, in fact, unexpected, their psychological effect on the Germans was much greater, both because of the problems they caused Germany and because they acted as a multiplier of the economic aspect in relations between Rome and Berlin. While this is beyond doubt, in order to fully understand and correctly assess these relations, we believe it is necessary to ask two questions. One is of a particular nature, specifically concerning the development of relations between the two Axis partners: without detracting from their impact, is it possible to consider Italian military events alone, together with Nazi "brutality," as the key to understanding these relations? The other is of a general nature (and should not be seen as an idle question or, worse, one tainted by "nationalist spirit," because, on the contrary, it is fundamental to a real understanding of Italian-German relations up to 1943): is the responsibility commonly attributed entirely to Italy for the defeat of the Axis in the Mediterranean justified, or should it rather, as Sadkovich has suggested, be divided more equally between Italy and Germany? And is it not possible that its specific causes should be sought not only in Italy's objective economic-industrial and military inferiority of Italy compared to the test to which Mussolini exposed it and in the mistakes made by the Italian side, but also in the political, even more than military, errors made by the Germans and by Hitler personally with regard to Italy? In order to try to answer these two questions, and having already clarified Mussolini's logic and strategy of the 'parallel war', we will focus our attention essentially on the German attitude. We will see that, at least until early 1941, this attitude was determined by a logic that, all things considered, was not radically different from the Italian logic of the 'parallel war' and which, of course, was no more "loyal" than Mussolini's, nor did it become so in the following years, because if one thing can be said without fear of contradiction, it is that Germany always and exclusively fought its own war, without worrying about its Italian ally except insofar as it considered it useful, namely to engage in the Mediterranean a part of the British forces that would otherwise have been used against it. The first observation regarding the German attitude is that there is absolutely no evidence that, despite knowing the limitations of the Italian economic and industrial situation and despite the reasons given by Mussolini in 1939 for not going to war, Berlin even consideredopportunity to study a comprehensive plan to aid its Italian ally. The same can essentially be said for the entire course of the war, because even when Rome's requests became more pressing and could no longer be ignored, the German response was

never to enable the Italian war industry to produce to its full potential, but rather to grant the bare minimum (and possibly less than promised) to patch up the situation, essentially from a military point of view, and to do so above all (but at the same time, with as little commitment as possible) in person, i.e., with their own units. There were certainly various reasons for this modus operandi that cannot be ignored. Firstly, the needs of the German economy and war industry, which from the outset of the conflict were unable to cover the entire national demand (and this, during the first two years, was more due to certain fundamental strategic choices, which would gradually prove to be erroneous, than to anyactual inadequacy) and then (when the attack on the Soviet Union failed to knock it out of action before winter set inwinter) committed to supplying first and foremost the bottomless pit that became the Eastern Front. This was all the more so because, despite having immediately introduced strict forms of rationing and control of the domestic market for as long as possible (and, in any case, with considerable delay), Hitler and some of his most important political collaborators, in order not to place too much of the burden of war on the civilian population, did not concentrate German industrial effort solely on war production, but left a not insignificant margin for civilian use. In addition to these objective reasons, there were others of a more psychological nature, which can be summarized under the common denominator of mistrust of Italians and their ability to make the best use of aid. Added to this complex set of reasons were others, no less (and perhaps more) important, of a clearly political nature, without which it is impossible to truly understand Italian-German relations and assess their respective responsibilities. That the issue of economic aid was one of the main cards in the Germans' political game with Italy can already be understood from the negotiations for coal supplies that took place during the period of "non-belligerence." The agreement of February 24, 11940 on economic relations and, in particular, on the aid in raw materials and manufactured goods that the two countries could provide each other (but in practice on coal, since the rest was vague and of little importance, especially as far as Germany was concerned, because it largely confirmed things that were already in place) arose essentially from the competition of the negotiations that Italy was conducting in parallel withEngland for coal supplies and the political significance that this competition assumed in those particular circumstances for Berlin. Without it, it is unlikely that Germany would have committed itself to supplying Italy with 12 million tons of coal per year. This is indirectly confirmed by the fact that, citing various justifications and excuses, the Germans never actually supplied the agreed quantities of coal (and on several occasions tried to obtain a formal reduction). It is worth noting that these quantities were less impressive than they might seem at first glance, since in the last year of peace, 1938, Italy had imported 7,003,450 tons of coal from Germany, to which must be added 1,635,940 tons imported from Poland and 203,682 tons from Belgium, two countries that came under German control in 1939 and 1940. Nor is it insignificant that, both before and after the conclusion of the agreement, the German side insistently sought to give it, as A. Giannini pointed out in a report to Ciano, "a political content" and to obtain unacceptable concessions from the Italian side. This shows that Germany, despite all assurances to the contrary, aimed to oust Italy from the Balkan region and wanted to take advantage of the opportunity to begin undermining its economic positions. In addition to a revaluation of the

mark compared to what had been established in previous agreements and the request "to supply it with everything we have at home, except for supplies from abroad' and 'to make every effort to give it everything it needs in raw materials (sulfur, hemp, mercury)', Berlin would in fact have demanded 'to leave the Balkan markets to it in order to sell and buy on markets that it cannot hold'. At the same time, it let the Italians know that they could no longer count on what they had imported before the war from the occupied Polish territories and asked them to 'divert" supplies destined for England to Germany and to engage in war smuggling for them. With British competition gone, Berlin was then careful not to make any further commitments and began to renege on those it had made and to drop or scale back the promises it had made to pave the way for the coal agreement, primarily the one relating to the supply of machinery that thethe Italian war industry needed. It did so in such an open manner and despite Rome's willingness to comply in practice with some of the requests that it could not officially accept (war contraband, copper supplies, etc.) that Attolico, in one of his last reports to Ciano as ambassador to Berlin, did not hide his disappointment and concern: It is clear that in this situation, the issue is no longer technical, but purely political. In essence, how much can Italy, which is at war or about to be at war, rely on its ally Germany? On the other hand, what is the value of the famous Clodius agreements, which required considerable sacrifices on our part?Is it possible to go on like this and, indeed, to face a situation of growing and increasingly urgent needs under these conditions? Why, on the other hand, must we continue to implement the Clodius agreements when they are not taken into account by the Germans? Why must we please our allies to the point of exposing ourselves as we are exposing ourselves for them right now in Spain for tungsten, when on the German side, only its design for a press desired by Temi, and for every machine there is procrastination, discussion and ultimately refusal? This attitude did not change even after Italy entered the war; in a certain sense, in fact, it can be said that it had become more pronounced. And this remained essentially unchanged even when, due to the worsening situation in Greece and North Africa, Italian requests for raw materials became more pressing and dramatic, to the point that Ciano, sending Alfieri a list of "strictly necessary" requirements on December 17, 1940, "in order for national industry to continue its war production" to be submitted to Hitler "on behalf of the Duce," he felt the need to specify: He immediately emphasized that the words "strictly necessary" were not just a figure of speech; if these raw materials were to be lacking or if the German government were to consider cutting the quantities we requested, industry would suffer an inevitable and immediate halt. Given the gravity of the situation and the dramatic nature of the Italian request, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider the outcome of this step, especially as it can be considered exemplary of the attitude and modus operandi of the Germans. From the telegram that Alfieri sent to Ciano on the night of December 19-20, it appears that the Führer, after declaring that he was perfectly aware of the needs of Italian production, for which he had words of praise, Alfieri sent to Ciano on the night of December 19-20, it appears that the Führer, after declaring that he was perfectly aware of the needs of Italian production, for which he had words of recognition, assured me that he would immediately forward the list of our requirements to his experts. Refraining from a detailed examination of our requests, the Führer maintained the need for the problem as a whole to be addressed,

studied, and resolved according to the criterion of "highest economic return," , i.e., coordinating the respective industrial needs of the two countries and relating them to the actual transport possibilities. Therefore, the Führer sees the opportunity to send finished products to Italy instead of bulky raw materials, in all cases where this is possible, having, on the other hand,Italy has new contingents of industrial workers available, with the aim of increasing production. By way of example, the Führer noted that instead of many chemical products, he considers it more convenient to send explosives ready foruse. After the Führer's statement, summarized above, I replied that referring the study and solution of the global problem, as he saw it, to his experts would necessarily require a certain amount of time, while our requests were imposed by the urgent and unavoidable nature of the need. The Führer then replied, again without going into detail, that some of the requests could be resolved more quickly, while others would have to find their solution according to the general coordination plan mentioned above. Finally, I felt I had to insist on the fact that the requests for certain raw materials—manganese, chromium, tin, mica, asbestos, were of the utmost urgency for us. Despite Alfieri's insistence in the following days, the technical examination of the Italian requests proceeded slowly. Ribbentrop had assured that some of them would be dealt with immediately, while for others an "intermediate solution" would be found that would allow them to be "broadly satisfied" "overall," but he had proposed that an Italian commission, including A. Giannini and General Favagrossa, would travel to Berlin between Christmas and New Year's Eve for a "quick conclusion on what can be done immediately" and, in cauda venenum, to make arrangements for thesending Italian labor to Germany. Things had only appeared to move quickly after Favagrossa's arrival in Berlin. Regarding weapons, the Germans had immediately said that they could offer, "almost entirely, only war booty, some of which was not modern" and that, given the difficulties arising from Germany's limited resources "as a result of consumption and the need toexpansion and reorganization" of the German armed forces and the scarcity of means of transport (an argument also used in relation to the tank cars requested to transport oil purchased in Romania to Italy), it was advisable, pending the development of a "long-term program graded in order of urgency," for the Italian side to send to the front "all the materials available in Italy." "Units that remained without materials would be rearmed with materials supplied by Germany, the use of which required a suitable period of training." Only when Mussolini, as we have seen, had yielded to Hitler's requests to meet him at the Berghof was General Favagrossa able to bring the negotiations to an apparently positive conclusion. We say "apparently" because, while it is true that on January 6, 1941 Clodius had sent Giannini a letter setting out the conclusions reached by the two parties "with a view to increasing Germany's supplies of war materials to ItalyItaly and to further develop cooperation between Italian and German industries in order to achieve the maximum common increase in the joint production capacity of the war industries of the two countries," the final agreements were not signed in Rome until February 26, and less than a month later, the Germans had already begun to violate them and even reduce coal supplies below the quantities established in theagreement of February 24, 1940. As mentioned, this agreement committed Germany to supplying Italy with 12 million tons of coal per year, one million per month. With the agreement of February 26, Favagrossa and Giannini had

managed to extract from Clodius an increase, from January 1, of 50,000 tons per month and that, "as far as possible," monthly supplies should not fall below one million; now, citing supply and transport difficulties, the Germans had not only already fallen below this figure, but were tending to reduce it to 850,000 tons per month, with very serious consequences for Italian industrial production. Hence the need on the Italian side to reopen negotiations almost immediately after believing they had been concluded and that they could therefore rely on a one-off supply, which was not sufficient to completely satisfy all needs, but was sufficiently substantial and secure. And to have to reopen them in a general situation that was more difficult and disadvantageous for Italy, since the conclusion of the conflict with Greece (the economic benefits of its occupation would have gone almost entirely to Germany) made it seem more justifiable to Berlin not to satisfy Rome's demands and, above all, because, in view of the now imminent attack on the Soviet Union, the resistance of the German Ministries of Economy and Transport and even more so of the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht was becoming more and more determined every day, as Giannini reported to Ciano in early June in the face of 'political' from Wilhelmstrasse, so much so that Alfieri saw no other solution to break the deadlock than 'direct intervention from above', i.e., Mussolini personally approaching Hitler. In June 1941, the military's resistance had finally been partially overcome. On the eve of the attack on the USSR, on the 19th, Giannini managed to obtain an "update" of the previous agreements that was not too unfavorable in theory, since it largely confirmed the commitments made by the Germans in February and improved the previous agreements relating to Italian trade with Belgium, Holland, and Norway. On the Italian side, it was possible to contain the "German tendency to increasingly inflate imports despite the certain deficit forecasts for clearing." However, the start of operations in the East and, above all, their prolongation beyond Hitler's forecasts immediately had repercussions on this new agreement. In practice, supplies, starting with coal and liquid fuels, continued to remain below the agreed quantity and to be delivered without respect for the scheduled times, which in turn affected the pace of production, in some cases even causing it to be interrupted, and on the possibilities of adequate use of the troops operating on the African front and the navy, which was burdened with the task of transporting and protecting the relevant supplies. Meanwhile, in Berlin, the Wehrmacht's Economic Office went so far as to suggest a radical review of the issue of supplies to Italy and a complete interruption of raw materials, to be compensated for by increased supplies of armaments. For the time being, this proposal had not been accepted, but the trend it expressed gained considerable strength when Albert Speer took over as Minister of Armaments of Armaments in early 1942, the influence of the economic services on government decisions took on a significance it had never had before. Once again, the economic and technical arguments of the Wehrmacht and Speer failed to prevail over the political arguments of the Wilhelmstrasse and Hitler. Indeed, in early 1943, theOKW, concerned as it was with putting some brakes on the Italian crisis, partially changed its position and advocated the need to respect the commitments made to Rome, at least with regard to coal. In any case, it is a fact that, although von Ribbentrop and especially Hitler opposed the solution proposed by the Wehrmacht and supported by Speer and wanted, for purely political reasons, the reconfirmation of the agreements made, in practice, during

1942-43, the political leaders and Hitler himself ended up allowing the military and economic leaders to disregard them in many cases and allowing Clodius, in Bastianini's words, to behave towards Italy as the "unflinching plunderer of enemies, friends, and allies" that he was, and they themselves became increasingly sensitive to motivations that were, on the one hand, increasingly economic and, on the other, revealed a state of mind towards Italy and the Italians more similar to that of the winter of 1940-41 than to that of the summer of 1942-43. on the one hand increasingly economic and, on the other, revealing a state of mind towards Italy and Italians more similar to that of the winter of 1940-41 than to the always critical and harsh, but, all in all, less contemptuous attitude of the first half of 1942. As for the failure to respect the commitments made, it suffices to recall that, according to a memo to Mussolini from General Favagrossa dated September 20, 1942, as of September 1, the Germans had not yet delivered 2,377,000 tons of coal, 243,000 tons of steel (equivalent to about three months of planned supplies), as well as about a whole year's supply of chromium, ten months of naphthalene, six months of aluminum, three months ofmanganese, and glycerin, etc. Furthermore, when the number of Italian soldiers on the Russian front exceeded that of German soldiers in Italy and North Africa, Berlin denounced the agreement reached the previous year that the related expenses would be borne by the "host" country. Nor can we ignore a series of other facts, including, in particular, that in February 1943, negotiations to update and bring the financial aspects of relations between the two countries more into line with the pressing needs of the moment ran aground on Germany's outright refusal to review the clearing system (requested by Rome for objective financial reasons, but also to limit Germany's purchases of war material and thus make maximum use of domestic production for Italian needs) and to give Italy, on the general compensation account,Italy (as Berlin had done with Romania and Hungary, "forced by the need to obtain essential raw materials," as Clodius said bluntly in rejecting the request) 250 million lire in hard currency or gold for purchases in neutral countries1 and the issue of Italian workers in Germany. Although at first glance this issue may seem unrelated or marginal to the problem we are dealing with, it is in fact, on the contrary, closely linked to it politically and economically and constitutes a significant indicator for further investigation of Nazi Vanimus towards Italians. In order to avoid overly simplistic assessments of German behavior in the Italian workers' issue, it is necessary first of all to take into account the growing shortage of labor (especially skilled labor) that Germany suffered throughout the war due to the excessive number of men called up for military service (from about 7.5 million in 1939-41 to about 10.5 million in 1944, of which, as far as the Wehrmacht and the SS were concerned, only 2.5 million were used in 210 divisions), the concept, in 1939-41, of the Blitzkrieg and its economy, and of Nazi ideology on race and family, which meant that, of all the belligerent countries, Germany was the one that made the least use of female labor in general and in industry in particular. As Milvard wrote, despite the insatiable demand for labor, in Germany the social ideas of National Socialism prevented any form of general mobilization of women. Since race and blood were considered the most important elements in the creation of the new society, procreation appeared to be a vital task. Arguments in favor of the sanctity and stability of the family were raised by agreement it cost us 12 billion and was one of the causes of inflation and

price increases. Now that, due to German insistence, we had to increase our forces in Russia to around 300,000 men and that Germany would therefore have to pay more than Italy, a curt telegram from Clodius informed us that the agreement had been canceled. The indignation was immense. See ddi, s. IX, X, pp. 71 ff., note for Mussolini dated February 23, 1943. In the last days of 1942, the Germans probably even conducted some surveys to test the ground for a possible Italian-German customs union (see G. Ciano, Diario, cit., p. 681). See A. S. Milvard, L'economia di guerra della Germania cit., pp. 56 ff. id. , Guerra, economia e società cit., p. 211. against the prospect of increased female employment, but in Germany they had particular force. The stock of Aryan women had to be preserved from the risks of death and accidents, since even in the eyes of an optimist it must have appeared rather insufficient to carry out the task assigned to it. Imprisoned in its logic, the party left a large part of the country's labor resources relatively unused. The maximum number of women employed, reached in 1943-44, was slightly higher than in 1939 and barely exceeded the low level of 1941 by 600,000.1 Social benefits for the wives and dependents of military personnel in Germany were relatively higher than elsewhere. It was therefore possible to survive on these benefits, whereas in Great Britain and the United States they were low enough to push women into the labor market. In this context, it is easy to understand why the Germans were very interested, even before the conflict (in a situation of full employment) and especially after its outbreak, in securing Italian labor for use in both agriculture and industry. It is also understandable how, in a completely different economic, financial, and employment situation, German requests were initially welcomed by both the Italian government and a large number of unemployed and workers attracted by the advantageous economic conditions offered to them. The first concerns arose when, as we have already mentioned, at the end of 1940 Berlin showed its intention to take advantage of Italy's difficulties, making the request for new workers (in the winter of 1940-41 there were about 100,000 in Germany) a sort of compensation for the aid requested by Rome. During 1941, the number of workers in Germany continued to increase, exceeding 230,000; after that, however, it began to decline: in 1942, the maximum number was 212,000 and at the end of the year 200,000, although the Germans had tried to get it raised to 325,000. In 1943, it would decrease to 160,000 in May. This was despite the fact that, as we have said, workers' remittances to Germany constituted a significant item of state revenue and, in particular, of financial relations with Germany, and there were those who would have preferred (some for strictly financial reasons, others so as not to irritate the Germans, and still others in the name of the 'common effort' and 'common victory') preferred to leave things as they were. The first to call for the suspension of new remittances (June-July 1941) and then (December 1942-February 1943) the gradual return of workers was essentially Mussolini. In 1943, the main concern was to recover as much labor as possible for the Italian economy and, probably especially when Bastianini took office at Palazzo Chigi, not to leave the Germans with a 'pledge' on which they could base a blackmail operation or, worse, take revenge in the event of Italy's withdrawal from the conflict. In 1941, Mussolini's decision was based on other considerations (which, moreover, also contributed to the decision in 1943), of a more 'political' nature', which originated in events that provide a significant clue to understanding the Nazi hostility towards Italians after the reversals in

Greece and North Africa. Until these military events, the conditions of Italian workers in Germany had been reasonable. Italian workers, in addition to being citizens of the Reich's main partner in the Axis, were valuable to the German economy and highly appreciated for their skills and performance, so much so that the contractual clauses had been respected, the treatment (the vast majority of workers were housed in camps near their workplaces, which were basic, almost squalid, but livable) had been good, and certain "excesses" by some (especially with German women) had not given rise to serious complaints, let alone harsh reactions against them. In 1941, this situation had rapidly deteriorated. In many places, an atmosphere of intolerance and contempt had developed around Italian workers, and the German authorities, in addition to no longer respecting the contractual clauses (especially those relating to holidays in Italy) and circumventing them with artificial changes of category and inaccurate calculations of piecework wages, they had also forbidden women from having any contact with them, as with other foreigners (going so far as to cut the hair or smear pitch on those who transgressed) and had begun to take harsh measures against those who committed acts of indiscipline and 'offenses' , such as loud noises and delays in returning to the camps, paying less and less attention to maintenance and living conditions in the camps themselves (to the point that some camps lacked water for washing) and intimidating and bribing Italian union representatives. This quickly led to a climate of intolerance and discontent among Italian workers, which in some cases resulted in protests, fistfights with Germans, and incidents that the police cracked down on harshly, even setting large dogs on workers who had committed minor offenses, which soon made headlines in Italy. Upon learning how the Germans , on June 7, Mussolini announced to the Council of Ministers that he wanted to suspend further shipments of workers, both because of how they were treated and regarded in Germany, and because they were needed in Italy, and, he said, because "I do not want the legend to arise and take root that there are chosen peoples destined to bear arms and others capable only of working, a kind of sub-people and slaves." This announcement was followed the following month by the formal decision to suspend new shipments ("because," Ciano noted, the ménage with the Germans was becoming increasingly difficult and fistfights were the order of the day") and to send the commissioner for migration and colonization to the Presidency of the Council, Giuseppe Lombrassa, to Germany to carry out an on-site investigation and assess the situation and the reliability of the news that was being transmitted by the embassy and consulates and sent by the workers themselves to their families. At first, these decisions had no effect on the Germans, except perhaps to exacerbate them further. The head of the National Socialist Party's racial policy office, Otto Gross, went so far as to tell Alfieri in no uncertain terms that the "very cordial" relations between the two countries could not extend to the racial sphere and result "a mixing of the two peoples," as would have happened if mixed marriages had been authorized. As for the police authorities, they began to intern workers in "re-education" camps for even minor offenses (indiscipline, abandonment of the workplace, laziness, attempts to return to Italy, etc.). Faced with this attitude, at the end of September Mussolini instructed Ciano to officially raise the issue with the Germans and, if necessary, with von Ribbentrop and Hitler personally. Ciano immediately discussed it with von Mackensen, Alfieri with Luther, Weizsäcker, and subsequently twice with von Ribbentrop

(on September 28 and October 18) and also with Himmler and Ley. At first, the results were very poor: many recriminations about the behavior and "anti-fascism" of Italian workers, vague assurances that thorough investigations were being carried out into the allegations against them, and some minor improvements in living conditions in the camps. However, when Rome made an explicit request that workers "morally and technically unsuitable for the conditions required for work in Germany" be reported for repatriation to the Italian authorities, who would also provide for any punishment, according to Italian law, of those who had committed serious crimes, but that the detention of Italian citizens in "re-education" camps was to be "absolutely" excluded, and Ciano personally discussed the matter with von Ribbentrop and Hitler on October 25, the German side preferred to play down the conflict. Hitler assured Ciano that he had ordered that no more workers be sent to "re-education" camps and that those guilty of indiscipline would be repatriated. After this meeting, von Ribbentrop tried once again to save face, so to speak, and to make the Führer's decision appear as a great act of friendship towards Italy, attributing all responsibility to the Italian workers and glossing over that of the Germans. Writing to Alfieri on November 4, he stated that from the reports in his possession and the ad hoc investigations he had ordered, it was clear that it was not Germany's fault that the mood of Italian workers in Germany was not, as you were told, good. From these reports and examples, it seems unequivocally clear that, on the one hand, the productivity of Italian workers has decreased here and there, while, on theon the other hand, almost everywhere their demands have increased, often beyond the limits of what Germany, even with the best will in the world, is able to give. Thus, for example, in many cases the demands of Italian workers exceeded the standard of living of German workers... In summary, I would like to say that, taking into account the material available, it would have been rather the Reich Foreign Ministry that had reason to turn to you E. to eliminate certain inconveniences affecting Italian workers. If the German authorities did not do so, but always tried to regulate and smooth things over on the spot, this was done in the consideration that, on the one hand, such cases could well occur when employing several hundred thousand Italian workers recruited in great haste and, on the other hand, they were not of such importance as to generally concern the governments of two friendly countries. On these controversial points, the dispute had subsided for the time being. The "disciplinary" condition of Italian workers improved considerably; however, there were much fewer improvements in terms of material living conditions. As Alfieri reported to Ciano on February 17, 1942, while many of the workers' past complaints about food had become less frequent (probably as a result of news from their families about increased food shortages and restrictions in the Kingdom, which did not exist a few months ago), and while in some camps it has been possible to eliminate a number of the major deficiencies, in most cases conditions remain essentially harsh. Poor equipment; insufficient sheets, soap, and straw mattresses; inadequate sanitary facilities. Undoubtedly, developments on the Russian front have also had an indirect impact in this area. Precisely for these reasons, it is not easy to insist that the German authorities comply more strictly with their contractual commitments. Based on the available documentation, it is impossible to say whether Alfieri's words were motivated by an excessive spirit of understanding for the difficulties faced by Germany or whether he was trying to play down the issue for fear

that, if it festered, it would further complicate relations between Italy and Germany, which were already fraught with many mutual 'misunderstandings'. What can be said is that, in any case, Ciano's meeting with Hitler and von Ribbentrop led to a certain détente and with it a modest resumption of the sending of workers to Germany. However, this was too modest for Berlin, increasingly beset by labor shortages, to be satisfied with, so that in January Clodius returned to the fray, requesting the dispatch of another 125,000 workers. The request was considered excessive in Rome, and in particular by Mussolini, from all points of view (moral, political, economic), but it could not be completely dismissed, both because, after the "understanding" shown by Hitler, a refusal would inevitably have been taken as a personal offense against him, and because at that moment Rome was in dire need not only for additional supplies of fuel oil, to enable the Navy to ensure supplies to the troops in Libya, but also, given the poor agricultural year, for wheat, and the only ones who could provide it were the Germans. On March 2, 1942, a new agreement was signed, under which ItalyItaly undertook to send another 79,600 workers to Germany during the year, 8,000 of whom would be employed by Italian companies to which the Germans had entrusted construction work. Of these, only 50,681 actually left between January 1943 and the time Rome decided to begin a gradual repatriation of workers in Germany.3. As we have already mentioned, the decision to bring back to Italy the workers who were in Germany was prompted by the labor shortage that was now also plaguing ItalyItaly, and probably the concern not to leave them in German hands in the event of Italy's withdrawal from the war, a possibility that, as we shall see in a later chapter, more than one person at Palazzo Chigi was now seriously considering. That said, however, the fact that, after Ciano's meeting with Hitler in October 1941, the 'disciplinary' treatment of Italian workers had improved considerably, their living conditions had not actually improved and in the vast majority of cases had further deteriorated, so In February, Palazzo Chigi turned toHungary for an extraordinary supply of 500,000 quintals of wheat; a similar request was subsequently made to Romania. In both cases, however, the results were disappointing, because both countries considered their grain stocks at that time to be insufficient and already heavily depleted by the Germans. In this situation, Italy had no choice but to turn to Germany. Repatriation would take place in contingents of about 12,000 workers per month, starting on April 1, 1943. In order to avoid antagonizing the Germans, it was also agreed that 5,000 construction workers would still be sent to Germany to build a synthetic gasoline plant, that 11,000 agricultural workers who had returned to Italy on vacation would return, and that those to be repatriated would be chosen by the German government "in such a way as to disrupt the running of the company to which they are assigned as little as possible, while also trying, in general, to make their departure coincide with the expiry date of their employment contract" (ASMAE, Coordination Office, b. 36, phase 1, "Germany (1943)". In the Landi Archive, "CFLI, Permanent statistical data, III. Germany": such as the attitude of the German authorities and population towards them. Among the various complaints received by Mussolini in the previous months, three seem to us to be among the most significant. On February 4, 1942, the secretary of the PNF, Vidussoni, sent Ciano a note on what had been reported by a hierarch from Imperia who had just returned from a trip to Germany. Vappunto focused on various aspects of the German reality discussed in the

Ligurian leader's report and, among other things, on the condition of Italian workers, the attitude of the Germans towards them, their behavior, and that of some Italian trade unionists: With regard to Italian workers, it should be noted that they are not well regarded; there are frequent incidents between Italian and German workers. In several camps, food supplies from Italy are being stolen; some managers are skimming off rations and selling the stolen portion to the Germans. In Brux, in the Sudetenland, following the killing of a 15-year-old girl attributed to our workers, the city is plastered with posters urging parents to keep their children away from the danger posed by Italian workers. Despite the points system, the notorious category of 'Neapolitan' category of street vendors of fabrics, dedicated to the worst kind of speculation, is still in circulation. Many of our workers point out that it would have been much better for national prestige and work performance to send contracting companies to Germany with a complete team of Italian workers and managers. Two months later, on April 4, Carlo Scorza, returning from celebrating the anniversary of the founding of the Fasci in Munich, wrote a long letter to Mussolini's private secretary, Nicola De Cesare, largely devoted to the condition of workers in Germany. In it, the future last secretary of the PNF focused on three aspects in particular. First of all, the attitude of the Nazi authorities and, in this case, the Bavarian gauleader Wagner, who, speaking in his presence about foreign workers in Germany, made no distinction between the various nationalities, but rather hardened his tone and gestures to utter words such as these: "In Germany, the only ones who have the right to command are the Germans, and all others must submit to what the Germans want." "Those who come to work for us must understand that we have the right to demand from them what we demand from our soldiers, and I would add that soldiers risk their lives and they do not'. 'There can be no working hours to be strictly observed, because soldiers have no working hours, nor can special conditions be made for anyone." Then on the subject of Italian workers: Italian workers in Germany generally have the mentality of emigrants. Therefore, their only concern is to make money, saving as much as possible even at the expense of their dignity; seeking by any means often humiliating and in some cases even dishonorable jobs in order to earn extraordinary wages. This mentality means that our workers do not feel that they are on an equal footing with the Germans and allies in a common war effort, but find themselves exclusively in the state of mind of those who are forced to work to earn a living and must show deference and respect to their foreign employer, towards whom they harbor resentment rather than sympathy in their hearts. And finally, on the German population, summarized in these few but significant words: the population generally judges our workers to be draft dodgers who have come to take the place of their German counterparts, who are forced to fight the war for Italy as well. The third testimony-denunciation is five months later and is much more concise, but no less explicit. It was formulated by one of the members of the mission, which we have already had occasion to mention, with which Vidussoni visited the Eastern Front and Germany in September-October 1942, PNF inspector Domenico Mittica: in some sectors, our workers are treated by the Germans in the same way as prisoners of war from enemy nations, thus undermining our dignity and giving rise to incidents with the latter. But even more significant than the economic aspect of Italian-German relations is the military one. In his memoirs, the German military attaché in

Italy, von Rintelen, wrote a few pages about the first months of Italian intervention that clearly explain the basic terms of the issue: When Mussolini announced his intention to take part in the war, Hitler should have demanded a commitment to a common conduct of the war. But neither of them wanted to allow their 'friend' to take a look at their own initiatives and aims... After the conclusion of the Compiègne armistice... Great Britain remained the only adversary left standing. Those who had thought that a joint plan for the two armies would now be drawn up were disappointed once again. The general staffs worked without concern; only Mussolini and Hitler kept in touch by letter. Each waged his own war against the British Empire: Mussolini south of the Alps, Hitler to the north. Hitler had not considered the value, following Italy's intervention in the conflict, of including the entire Mediterranean in the war zone would be following Italy's entry into the conflict; Mussolini considered this area to be his domain. Hitler had declared his lack of interest in the Mediterranean; now he entrusted military tasks in that region exclusively to his ally, thus granting Mussolini full implicit authorization for a "parallel war."In July 1940, von Rintelen continued, I went to the OKH [Army High Command] in Fontainebleau and the OKW [Wehrmacht High Command] in Berlin to personally promote contact between the military leaders of the two countries. At the OKH, I was told that the OKW had reserved all military contact with the ally for itself. The Chief of Staff, General Haider, strongly recommended that I obtain a request from the Italian side for German armored contingents for the campaign in North Africa, since he had already become convinced in August 1939, during maneuvers in northern Italy, that the Italian army had only a few armored units with modern weaponry. At the OKW, I received no satisfactory answer. I was taken to Hitler, who confidentially pointed out to me that he was not in a position to supply the Italians with weapons by diverting them from German objectives.I received no satisfactory response from the OKW. I was taken to Hitler, who confidentially pointed out to me that he was not in a position to supply weapons to the Italians by diverting them from German objectives. He lacked weapons, first and foremost the tanks that would have had to be prepared for the formation of his own new units... Despite this rejection, on August 2, a response came from the OKW that Italian needs had to be met exhaustively from the French war booty. However, the Italians did not receive much, and in any case no armored vehicles. In a longer conversation, Keitel... explained to me that it was too early for an interview with Badoglio and closer contact with the leaders of the Italian army, and that the Führer wanted to clarify some political issues. From von Rintelen's account, it is clear that Hitler was opposed to supplying arms to Italy from the outset and that both the OKH and the OKW probably shared his position, even though there were those, such as General Haider, would have liked to send armored units to North Africa to support the Italian ones in their operations in Egypt. The proposal was submitted by the OKH to Hitler in August, who accepted it and, after scaling it down from a full-fledged armored corps to "a small armored brigade with some reinforcements," forwarded it to Mussolini, who, however, let it fall through. Similarly, Badoglio, who had sent General Marras to Berlin to obtain war material, in turn rejected an offer of two armored divisions made to him "in exchange" by the OKH. On October 4, at the meeting in Brenner, Hitler renewed his offer to Mussolini of a "contribution" of German "specialized forces" to the attack on Egypt. But the "Duce," even though Oraziani's offensive

had meanwhile stalled at Sidi el Barrarli, declined again, limiting himself to a vague reference to the possibility that, in the phase of operations following the conquest of Marsa Matruh, trucks, 'a number of heavy tanks and some Stuka formations'. In other words, nothing more than he had already said to von Ribbentrop when the latter was in Rome on September 19-22. Mussolini's response must have prompted Keitel and Jodl to insist on sending troops to Libya, probably convinced that, by refusing to provide them with only vehicles, the Italians would make a virtue of necessity and accept the presence of organic units. In the days following the Brenner meeting, leveraging, on the one hand, the importance for the Axis of occupying the Suez Canal (which they defined as "today's number one military problem in the conduct of the war") and, on the other hand, on the argument that it would take at least eight weeks to bring an organic unit to Africa, both returned to talking to General Marras about sending, for the time being, an armored unit (according to Marras, a reduced division or a reinforced brigade, with about 120 tanks). Hitler's reaction was much more cautious. This was despite the fact that on July 31, he himself had declared that, despite the preparations for the landing in England, "diversionary actions" could be considered (hence the Wehrmacht's proposal to support the Italian attack on Suez with two armored divisionsattack on Suez, to which Hitler had shown a preference for his own attack on Gibraltar to be carried out in agreement with Franco) and from September, when the landing in England appeared increasingly unlikely, Admiral Raeder pressed him to shift the center of gravity of the war to the Mediterranean. In reality, if the Führer was thinking of an intervention in the Mediterranean, he conceived it not so much in Egypt, but on Gibraltar and French North Africa, and therefore, subject to agreement not only with Mussolini, but also with Franco and Pétain; in other words, not really offensive, as would have been the case with a 'march to the east', beyond Suez, which would have struck at the heart of theBritish Empire, but defensive, strengthening the "continental blockade" to discourage British resistance and induce London to negotiate even without the invasion of its national territory. And what is more important (since the size of the forces that the OKW wanted to send to Libya would not have greatly weakened either the possible action on Gibraltar or that against theUSSR, which Hitler was now considering more and more seriously), he did not see Italy's position clearly at all, so he did not want to create further difficulties with Mussolini and Badoglio, whom he knew to be decidedly hostile to German intervention in Libya, and, above all, he wanted to ascertain the real intentions of the "Duce". Hence i) his substantial passivity at Brenner in the face of Mussolini's refusal and his contentment with the commitment that the two chiefs of staff, Keitel and Badoglio, would meet to examine the collaboration between the two armies from a technical point of view; 2) his very probable delaying of the Keitel-Badoglio meeting (which he had requested on October 24 and again on October 25, despite Keitel's initial response that it could only take place after "the conditions for a common conduct of the war" had been established at the political level), to the point that it would only take place on November 14-15, after the Italian attack on Greece and, therefore, in a completely different context of Italian-German relations; 3) his hasty dispatch of General Thoma to Italy, officially to study and agree on the forms of collaboration (to be kept to a minimum) in Libya, was in fact already mentioned in the previous chapter to understand whether Mussolini was thinking of "switching sides" and

strengthening his trust in Germany; 4) his not batting an eyelid at the fact that only twelve days after General Thoma had agreed with Badoglio on October 16 to send 12,000 men and 120 tanks weighing 20 tons, Mussolini informed him at the meeting in Florence on the 28th that he had given up on the idea. pp. 240 ff. The request had been supported by Badoglio and endorsed by Mussolini. See Q. Armelini, Diario di guerra cit., p. 99 (October 2, 1940). On the meeting and its background, see L. Ceva, L'incontro Keitel-Badoglio del novembre 1940 nelle carte del generale Marras, in "Il Risorgimento," June 1977, pp. 1 ff. See Sme Uff. Storico, Diario storico del Comando Supremo cit., II, I, pp. 239 ff.; as well as Q. Armellini, Diario di guerra cit., p. 116. See Sme Uff. Storico, Diario storico del Comando Supremo cit., II, I, p. 305 (October 29, 1940); as well as Q. Armellini, Diario di guerra cit., p. 129; however, nothing appears in the minutes of the meeting drawn up by Ciano (see DDI, s. IX, V, pp. 771 ff.). 5) His consequent decision to suspend any further action at least until the Italians had reached Marsa Matruh. On November 4, Hitler justified this decision to his military collaborators by stating that sending troops to Libya "across seas that we do not control and with an ally who is not fully committed to keeping these seas open" was "operationally risky." In reality, even aside from the serious crisis of confidence that, as we saw in the previous chapter, had arisen in Italian-German relations in the months following the capitulation of France, Hitler had no intention of committing himself fully to the Mediterranean, whose decisive strategic importance, it is worth repeating once again, he did not understand and, all things considered, never understood, just as, partly due to his suggestion (i.e., so as not to show disagreement with him) and partly because of their "continental" culture and their peculiar technical training, which was entirely linked to Prussian military history, most of the German military leadership did not understand it, nor did they understand the need to "waste" forces, let alone resources, to help an ally who, apart from his personal relationship with Mussolini, was disappointed, did not believe he could effectively contribute to the German victory, and in certain circumstances came to distrust him and whose post-war demands were, in his eyes, not only "excessive" but often in contrast with his plans. An ally, moreover, who was unpopular among the Germans and frowned upon by significant sectorsopponents of the National Socialist Party. Given this situation, and not realizing that "not only the fate of Italy but also that of Germany was at stake in the Mediterranean," Hitler was quite happy with the "parallel war" desired by Mussolini: on the one hand, it avoided him having to commit himself personally in the Mediterranean and, on the other, it avoided him having to agree on anything military with Mussolini and the Italians and even to keep them truly informed of his military plans; while at the same time using them when he deemed it useful, as in the case of relations with Spain. This attitude, on closer inspection, continued even after the Italian invasion of Greece and the victorious British counteroffensive in North Africa, so much so that the "coalition war" which the Germans sought to impose on Italy in place of the 'parallel' war, not only left Mussolini with considerable scope to continue waging his own 'parallel war', albeit on a smaller scale, but, all things considered, even with Hitler's approval. Having unilaterally decided to attack the USSR, Hitler felt it was more convenient for the burden of the war in the Mediterranean to fall as heavily as possible on Italy. Even if it was not foreseeable that this would bring success, the important thing was that it would engage as many British forces and American

aid as possible and that Germany's involvement would be limited to the bare minimum, so as not to take men and resources away from the Eastern Front, not expose it to setbacks that would have tarnished the prestige of its armed forces and, at the same time, avoid the loss of Libya, which would have opened up French North Africa to the British and, ultimately, could have provoked an internal crisis in the fascist regime, thus exposing Germany's southern flank and complicating the already difficult situation in the Balkans. Significant in this regard are Hitler's reluctance and slowness to commit himself to supporting his ally in Africa and the modesty of the commitment itself. Although von Rintelen had already informed the OKW on November 23 that he believedItaly was not capable of waging war in the Mediterranean on its own and that an Italian disaster could have a negative impact on the overall conduct of the war, Hitler's decision to intervene was taken, after much uncertainty, only when the military situation became dramatic in both Greece and North Africa and Rome's requests for help became more insistent. The order to transfer the X Air Corps to southern Italy and Sicily was givenon December 1, when the British went on the counteroffensive; the order concerning the Afrika Korps, initially conceived as a "barrier corps" with essentially defensive tasks, was only given at theearly February (the first request for troops for Libya had been made by General Guzzoni to von Rintelen on December 20) after his meeting with Mussolini at the Berghof and the simultaneous meeting between Keitel and Jodl with Guzzoni, so that the first units did not arrive in North Africa until February 12, 1941. Neither Hitler nor Fokw changed their attitude when Rommel blockedthe British in Sirte and then, more due to their mistakes than his own merit, turned the situation around, recapturing Benghazi on April 4 and reaching Tobruk a week later. All focused on the imminent attack on the USSR and unable toto grasp the strategic importance of the Mediterranean theater, they attached no importance to the possibilities that the new situation in Libya could open up for the Axis (on March 20, von Brauchitsch told Rommel that the OKW had no intention of launching an offensive in North Africa or sending him reinforcements, and the following month Hitler ordered him not to push beyond the Egyptian border any case beyond the Egyptian border), nor did they pay any attention to the much greater possibilities that, as has been said, greatly distressed Churchill, opened up by the conquest shortly afterwards of Greece and in particular Crete, and by the crisis in Iraq and Syria. Thus, looking back over the events of 1941-42, with a little emphasis, but essentially correctly, Admiral Assmann was able to write: Now the German troops were in Crete and the Peloponnese: the second bridgehead against Africa had been built. It was not as passable as the one insouthern Italy; the traffic lines that would have had to pass through the Balkans would have been insufficient for supplies, but the new bridgehead was closer to the objective that attracted us to Africa. One of the first laws of warfare requires the exploitation of success. The campaign in the East had not yet begun, Russia was intimidated and compliant. The hour of destiny had struck for Germany and its people, but the German High Command refused to listen: the course remained set for the East! For a mind oriented towards the continent, this was logical and consistent: Russia could be reached by land, but below, on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, the continent ended and the sea began. The sea was unfriendly and, in a way, foreign. The British ruled that sea, which was considered unpleasant but God-given. Let it not be said that even the

"Seelóve" had to be given up, becauseEngland had dominion over the sea and it was impossible to wrest it from their hands. The conditions were fundamentally different; over there, across the sea, there was an enemy coast prepared to defend itself, which had to be conquered by sea, while in the Mediterranean we were on both sides of the sea. It is not permissible to assert that World War II would have ended in a German victory if Adolf Hitler had chosen the right path at that fateful moment, because such an assertion would be based on a hypothesis, but there is no doubt that Hitler laid the foundation stone for the German catastrophe when he chose the wrong path at that moment. And yet, later, in the summer of the following year, as subsequent developments would show, there was perhaps another opportunity to wrest the Mediterranean area from the British. To achieve this decisive result, a single major effort would have been necessary, perhaps by abandoning the offensive in Russia for the Caucasus. The oil in the Caucasus was certainly important, but that of Iraq was no less valuable. In any case, the struggle for the Mediterranean area would certainly not have been close to ending. If we imagine where the Allies could have focused their efforts to recapture the Mediterranean area after losing it, there is no doubt that they would have resorted to all the means at their disposal and made unprecedented efforts to regain a position so vital to the British Empire. The simultaneous strain that German military power was sustaining with the campaign in Russia would have increased their hopes of finally achieving their much-desired goal. But it would have become a struggle lasting years, which, in order to be sustained, would have encountered many difficulties for the Allies, given the heavy toll that their maritime traffic had to pay in the face of submarine warfare. After Japan's entry into the war, their forces were also stretched to the limit of their endurance. So what would have happened to the invasion of France? It would be going too far to assert that the expulsion of the Germans from the Mediterranean and the revolt in Italy were the prerequisites for the Normandy landings. The plan for this landing dated back to a time (1942) when everything in the Mediterranean was still up in the air; but it is certainly not true that the Allies could have undertaken the landing in question as long as the Axis powers had unlimited dominance in the Mediterranean area. This page by the former head of the Historical Office of the Supreme Command of the Kriegsmarine, written in the aftermath of the war for awork intended primarily for an audience of Anglo-American military technicians, does not take into account the weight that ideology had on Hitler's decisions and, obviously, overlooks the particular psychological and political motivations behind the Führer's attitude towardsItaly, which contributed to determining his Mediterranean strategy and led him to underestimate and disregard (or rather, postpone until after the victory over the Soviet Union) the more realistic and lucid vision that, as already mentioned, some of his collaborators, not coincidentally generally from the Navy, and Mussolini himself had. A Mussolini who, but we will return to this, above all, as General Faldella1, had by then been "taught by experience" from the grave mistake of attacking Greece, and from then on would avoid rash military decisions and have "a more realistic view of the situation and needs," while Hitler would increasingly lose his sense of reality and make "bewildering and ruinous decisions." See E. Faldella, Revisione di giudizi cit., p. 237. Despite their summary nature and the limitations we have mentioned, the considerations ofAdmiral Assmann, and in particular the reference to the operations of

summer 1942 in Egypt, have the merit of helping to put into the right terms a question that has too often been taken for granted and sometimes presented in terms that are contrary to the truth. In order to truly understand the military and, directly or indirectly, also the political relations between Italy and Germany in 1941-42, it is necessary to realize that the dispatch of the Afrika Korps to North Africa did not mean a substantial change in the Germans' assessment of the Mediterranean theater or a shift in their attitude toward Italy. Political and military considerations (to prevent the other main Axis partner from suffering too many humiliations that would inevitably damage Germany's image abroad and have negative repercussions on the morale of its own public opinion, and even cause it to withdraw from the conflict, leaving Germany to cover a new front all by itself) and, as far as Hitler was concerned, also personal considerations (his relationship with Mussolini) had led Berlin to patch up the military situation in North Africa and eliminate the thorn in its side created by Mussolini's aggression against Greece. With the situation restored in both respects, everything returned to almost the same terms as before for the Germans, with the only difference being that, their contempt and distrust of the Italians having grown in the meantime, the political and psychological motivations that had inspired Berlin's attitude towardsItaly were now joined by a sort of angry resignation towards an ally who was considered (remember the scathing judgment preserved in Goebbels' diary) the worst possible, but who had an important political and military function for Germany and therefore had to be helped, but here is the crux of the matter, helped essentially only to prevent him from collapsing. So any help that was not strictly necessary to avert this danger was considered a useless waste, a diversion of men, resources, and precious raw materials from the war effort and the Reich's economy. Similarly, political interventions had to be conceived with priority given to their usefulness for Germany rather than for Italy. With all the consequences, so to speak secondary, that followed from this logic: exploiting the potential of the Italian economy as much as possible and countering itsexpansion in the occupied territories; to place the greater burden of occupying the economically less important and militarily more difficult to control areas of Yugoslavia on the Italian armed forces and, if necessary, to sacrifice Italian soldiers to save their own (something that would happen almost regularly, especially in Russia, but also in North Africa); to reduce their commitment in the Mediterranean and North Africa as much as possible; attribute the successes of the Italian-German forces to the German command and troops and the failures to the Italians, even when the situation was quite the opposite; and, finally, exclude the Italians from major strategic and political decisions and ignore their proposals and requests, which were more or less alternative in nature. If this path did not lead to the demand, as some proposed, for formal German control of the war in the Mediterranean, it was due to Hitler's desire not to humiliate the "Duce" and his conviction that he could achieve the same result "by using [his] personal influence on Mussolini,"2 thus avoiding the threefold risk of a) hurting the pride and self-esteem of the Italian military leadership too much and pushing them to break away from the regime, b) arousing fears and negative reactions in relations between Germany and its other allies, and c) providing arguments for enemy propaganda that would inevitably act as multipliers of Italian frustrations. From this perspective, it is understandable why, despite the fact that "officially' an end had been put

to the 'parallel war', after the talks between Keitel, Jodl, and Guzzoni on January 19-20, 1941, which coincided with the Hitler-Mussolini talks at the Berghof, until the Anglo-American landing in French North Africa and even after, there were very few meetings between the German and Italian military leaders, and all of them took place within the framework of those between Hitler and Mussolini. Rather than meetings between military leaders (who could always find technical points of convergence and agreement that he did not like), Hitler preferred to entrust the argumentation of his strategic decisions and his "suggestions" regarding the conduct of operations in the Mediterranean to Mussolini. They were not sure of the "Duce's" reaction to such an intervention, but above all because Hitler was sure that his place would be taken by Dino Grandi. As Hitler said to von Rintelen (Mussolini l'Alleato cit., p. 115), an "unsteady friend" of Germany like Ciano was always preferable to a "firm enemy" like Grandi. It is characteristic that even when Rommel recaptured Sirte and prepared to push towards Tobruk, the German commitment was overall less than the Italian one, even with regard to the sending of armored vehicles. From January 1 to June 22, 1942, 474 tanks and 86 Italian armored cars, compared to only 271 German tanks and 40 armored vehicles. See E. Rintelen, Mussolini l'Alleato, op. cit., p. 118. the personal letters he wrote from time to time to Mussolini and the rare meetings he had with him, sending, in special cases, influential National Socialist politicians such as Göring and von Ribbentrop to Rome to support them and get them accepted by the 'Duce'. As for the "low cuisine" of military operations, i.e., the implementation of his "suggestions," von Rintelen, who became a sort of super liaison officer (with his own large staff of collaborators) between the two supreme commands, but also between Hitler and Mussolini. In December 1941, when the Italian-German troops in North Africa were once again pushed back to the west and the fate of Libya depended on the possibility of getting the necessary reinforcements and supplies there, he was joined by Marshal Albert Kesselring. As commander of the German air forces sent to Italy to participate in operations in North Africa and the Mediterranean and to ensure supplies to Libya, Kesselring, in the intentions of Hitler, Göring, and the OKW, was also supposed to assume supreme command of the southern sector and, as such, of the Italian military, naval, and air forces. However, Cavallero opposed this, saying he was willing to cede to him at most only the command of the Air Force (which Mussolini had transferred in those days from Pricolo to Fougier, who had collaborated with Kesselring as commander of the Italian Air Corps at the time of the Battle of Britain). Kesselring, who, in addition to being a highly capable military man (having moved to the Luftwaffe from the Reichswehr), was gifted with a remarkable political sense, instead of insisting, as Berlin would have liked, on his request, he reached a sort of "gentlemen's agreement" with Cavallero, whereby, in exchange for his renunciation of command of the Air Force, the Supreme Command undertook not to take any decisions concerning the theater of operations in Libya and related matters without discussing them with him and without his approval. On this basis, Kesselring established excellent relations with both Mussolini and, above all, Cavallero and the Supreme Command, even better than those that von Rintelen had had until then. Compared to von Rintelen, Kesselring had the advantage of not being essentially a "politician" in military garb acting as a transmission belt for German war management in the Mediterranean, but a "true" military man,

technically very capable, with a comradely attitude, understanding of the problems of the Italians and, above all, able to realistically assess the situation in which the Italian-German forces had to act and discuss it not only with the Italian Supreme Command (and present it to Mussolini), but also with the OKW and, if necessary, with Hitler in its objective reality and not in terms that were too often based on a vision deliberately corresponding to that which others had made of it or too optimistic and personalistic, such as that of Rommel, certainly the most respected and listened to among the German generals in Italy by the OKW and, above all, by Hitler. At this point, even without failing to adhere to the criterion of not spreading ourselves too thin in the reconstruction and examination of military events and limiting ourselves to a few quick general references, which are essential for highlighting the close connection between the political and military aspects of the war and understanding Mussolini's position and behavior, there are at least three good reasons why we need to dwell a little more extensively than we have done so far on certain aspects and moments of these events. The first is the decisive influence that the course of military operations, especially those in North Africa, had on the fate of the fascist regime and its crisis, and the second is Mussolini's political and personal, human, crisis. The third also concerns Mussolini, but from a particular perspective, one that is very important biographically, but also historically, and yet never addressed in truly historical terms, which can be summarized with the phrase Mussolini as "military leader." It is certainly not our intention to argue that the war was lost because of Mussolini's inability as a "military leader," nor that it could have been won if the "Duce" had been able to put his abilities as a "military leader" into practice. However, since we do not like "les grands simplificateurs, méme costumés en historiens" and we want above all else to give an image of the events discussed that is as close to the truth as possible, we believe that focusing on this particular aspect is not only important (and essential in a biography of Mussolini), but also helps greatly to shed light on other issues of. Almost all those who held important positions in the Italian armed forces during World War II, and in their wake many Italian and foreign scholars, have argued that Mussolini, in his egocentricity, considered himself a military genius and that, 'concerned above all with demonstrating that it was he, and he alone, who exercised command', he claimed to personally direct the war on the military front, despite lacking any technical preparation to do so and, given his 'journalistic mentality', being primarily concerned with managing public opinion. By claiming to personally direct the war, Mussolini effectively prevented those who were competent and prepared from doing so. This led to a series of negative consequences: constant changes in plans and constant interference in thethe effective exercise of command, the dispersion of available forces across multiple fronts, making success impossible on any of them, the underestimation of risks, replacements and appointments based on personal considerations rather than real competence and suitability for certain commands, etc. Before going into the merits of these statements, however, it is necessary to clarify a preliminary issue that is too often overlooked when discussing Mussolini as a "military leader." From the Franco-Prussian War onwards (and in many respects already from the Napoleonic Wars), one of the main problems, if not the central problem, of all major conflicts has been the greater or lesser awareness of those responsible for leading the states involved in them that modern warfare now emphasizes the aspect of

'domestic politics', since, given the enormous number of soldiers deployed and the masses mobilized materiallyand psychologically on the home front, and the need to commit all available economic resources to the war effort, it involves peoples, nations, and state apparatuses in their entirety, as much as the aspect of 'foreign policy', whose role is no longer essentially manifested at the outbreak and conclusion of the conflict, but becomes its point of balance and common thread with regard to enemies, neutrals, and allies, and its final outcomes. In this context, the conduct of war can no longer be conceived and addressed solely in military terms but, on the contrary, involves taking into account a whole series of aspects (domestic, economic, foreign policy, etc.) that in the past had a much lesser impact, and the ability to bring them together and harmonize them with the more immediate and typically military aspects in a single war strategy. This was certainly not an easy problem to solve, given the reluctance of the military to see their role as "warlords" diminished and to accept external 'interference' and conditioning, but also because of the lack of understanding of their needs on the part of politicians, which at the time of the Franco-Prussian War had caused the conflict between Bismarck and Moltke and which then led to Clemenceau's famous statement that war is too serious a matter to be left to generals alone, so that it is up to politicians to set the basic guidelines and make the most significant decisions, while the military should make suggestions and take care of the tactical conduct of operations. This problem, however, was solved and consecrated in a positive way during World War II, in the sense that all major strategic and military decisions were made (with the sole exception of Japan, where the direction of the war was completely in the hands of the military, and the semi-exception of China, due to the fact that Chiang Kai-shek held both powers in his own person) by the political power based on essentially political considerations. And by a 'political power' which, despite obviously having very different bases, compositions, and forms of manifestation, depending on thepolitical and constitutional structure of the regimes of the various belligerent countries, was, as far as this type of decision was concerned, even in democratic countries, limited to relatively few people and in fact largely concentrated in the hands of one person. From this point of view, Hitler, Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt were undoubtedly, albeit in different ways and with different powers, 'military leaders', as was Mussolini. They too conceived operations from a perspective that was very often (and especially in the case of fundamental strategic decisions) essentially political. They also 'interfered' in them, albeit to varying degrees (most of all Hitler and Stalin, but also Churchill to a considerable extent), and they made their mistakes. Some because of the excessive ideologization and politicization of their choices (Hitler and Roosevelt), others due to excessive activism and a tendency to think too big and, therefore, ultimately too optimistically (Churchill), and still others due to excessive interference and underestimation of the arguments put forward by the military (Hitler and Stalin); all, to a greater or lesser extent, due to a common attitude of distrust towards the 'political intelligence' of the military and criticism of their inability to detach themselves from schemes that, rightly or wrongly, they considered outdated and to 'invent' new ones. Hitler and Stalin, and to some extent Churchill, considered themselves 'strategists'. Regarding the actual military qualities of the Soviet dictator, his management of operations, and his mistakes, after two decades of exaltation of his military "genius" and another of

reticent, half-hearted criticism, it is only very recently, in the wake of Gorbachevism, that some light has begun to be shed on the matter, albeit, for now, only in extremely general terms and without any documentary evidence. However, some firm points can be established. Not only did Stalin lack any military training, but before the German invasion of the USSR, he had never really dealt with military matters, except when, in the second half of the 1930s, his policy of terror had targeted and eradicated the top leadership and a large part of the best middle-ranking officers of the Red Army. Just as in the months preceding the German attack he had ignored information about its preparations and even regarded those who provided it with suspicion, so even after the conflict with Finland he continued to overestimate the state of preparedness of the Soviet armed forces, contenting himself with thethe image they presented in parades and films, without worrying whether it corresponded to reality. His basic political strategy did not envisage the Soviet Union's participation in the conflict. For him, there was no difference between the Axis and its opponents: both sides were expressions of 'capitalism' and 'imperialism', so that, to use Molotov's words spoken on October 31, 1939, to the Supreme Soviet, it was "senseless" and "criminal" to fight for their success and strengthening under false ideological pretexts. What Stalin had been aiming for since the mid-1920s was a conflict between the "imperialist" great powers that would allow the Soviet Union first to secure increasingly favorable positions in Europe and Asia through political and diplomatic means and then, when the "imperialist" great powers had weakened themselves by fighting each other, to Bolshevize Europe and open the way to the Middle East. After Hitler came to power, this line underwent a gradual adjustment: Stalin, in fact, as is now coming to light, had pragmatically cultivated both the solution of an alliance with the Western powers and that of an alliance with Germany and, ultimately, the latter more than the former, so much so that E. Gnedin stated that Soviet policy towards Nazi Germany can be seen as a consistent line connecting 1934 to 1939, which was reinforced by Stalin's terror and purges during those years. In this logic, the military moment ended up becoming, in his eyes, more than a truly decisive 'support' than truly decisive. This was all the more so because, denying any real value to the ideological motivations of the 'capitalist' and 'imperialist' powers fighting each other, Stalin ruled out a priori the possibility that Hitler might turn against him. The German attack thus took him completely by surprise, plunging him into a state of deep prostration that for several weeks led him to take no interest in anything and for many months (until the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942) caused him to lose confidence in the army and its ability to recover, rekindled his suspicions of the military, and led him to remove a large number of commanders whom he considered incompetent and untrustworthy, many of whom were shot or deported on his orders. As Marshal Zhukov suggested in his memoirs, Stalin was essentially an 'organizer', primarily concerned with war production, which he wanted to direct and control personally, but he made mistakes that were not insignificant, such as the one (which General Grigorenko described tout-court as a ' whim ' inspired by ' ignorant "specialists" ') to introduce unnecessary and harmful changes in artillery production. As for his real military abilities, Khrushchev, in his memoirs and in his famous 'secret report' to the 20th Congress of the CPSU (very cautious about everything concerning the military aspect of the 'Great Patriotic War'), made two "revelations" which, given the scarcity of

available documentation, are enough to significantly diminish the myth of his "military genius '. The first concerns the disastrous counteroffensive in Kharkov in 1942, which Khrushchev bluntly described as a disaster caused by Stalin, who imposed it against the advice of the military. The second is more general in nature, but no less explicit: the tactics Stalin insisted on [frontal attacks], ignoring the basics of war strategy, cost us a great deal of bloodsheduntil we managed to stop the enemy and go on the offensive. The case of Hitler is different, as there is a wealth of documentation available on both his war strategy and his role as a 'military leader', as well as some highly valuable specialist studies. Hitler also lacked any technical military training at first, but he had read extensively on the subject and this, together with his constant contact with his military staff, composed of men who 'were the absolute best in their profession compared to any other country', enabled him to acquire technical knowledge that was undoubtedly superior to that of all other 'military leaders' of the Second World War and even many senior officers. It should be added that Hitler, in addition to a remarkable ability to understand and assess the mentality and morale of his troops, had, in the words of Liddell Hart, a "natural flair for unorthodox strategy and tactics" that sometimes bordered on genius and enabled him to conceive great operations, achieve great successes (as in the campaigns in Norway and France), and save situations that seemed hopelessly compromised (as in the winter of 1941-1942 in Russia), even if his status as an amateur in the field meant that this flair "was accompanied by a propensity to make elementary errors, both in calculation and in action."In fact, it must be said that in the early years of the war and, all things considered, until the failed assassination attempt of July 20, 1944, which aroused in him a sort of psychosis of betrayal, Hitler's suspicion and criticism of professional military personnel not only remained within fairly limited bounds but, rather than being typical of a bourgeois who had fought in the First World War and of a revolutionary, were largely dictated by the fact that, given his particular intuition, while on the one hand he appreciated their great professional efficiency, on the other hand he mistrusted and criticized them for being too "orthodox," too tied to antiquated, almost mathematical patterns, and too reluctant to accept new and unorthodox ideas and tactical solutions that their mentality and technical training rejected. To these reasons for mistrust and criticism (which contrasted with his great confidence in generals such as Guderian and Rommel) was added, over time, another that had the effect of multiplying the number and severity of his mistakes and had a decisive influence on his overall strategy: the emergence and deepening of the doubt that the 'old' professional military lacked the tenacity and perseverance necessary to 'resist' and 'overcome' the crisis, two qualities that he considered to be of paramount importance and the prerequisite for everything else. This fanatical overestimation of the power of will and the psychological tension it caused him led, directly or indirectly, to his most tragic mistakes in the second half of the war: his loss of "the sense of the dividing line between the possible and the impossible" and the increasing weighting ideological values on the war and his personal "mission," his unwillingness to surrender to the evidence that the war was now lost, and his prolonging it to the bitter end, waiting for the differences between the Western and Soviet Allies to cause the enemy coalition to break up and a reversal of the situation, such as that which had allowed Frederick II to emerge victorious from the Seven Years' War. The first

consequence of this state of mind was what Schramm called his "estrangement from the front." By the end of 1942, Hitler, while concentrating all power in his own hands, greatly reduced his contact with the front lines and increasingly began to rely on "inspiration" for his military judgments and decisions. Distrustful of everyone and everything, relying increasingly on submarine warfare and "secret weapons" to reach the "turning point," and finally having less and less sense of the actual reality of the military situation, he fanatically clung to the belief that the secret of success lay in the most rigid defense "in place" and therefore refused to allow local commanders any decision-making autonomy, evenwithin precise general instructions. As Marshal von Manstein wrote in his memoirs, from his desk at headquarters in East Prussia, Hitler "believed he could see everything much better than the commanders at the front,", so that his numerous and detailed interventions were almost always overtaken by events, based on second- or third-hand information and assessments, and therefore counterproductive: He had become increasingly accustomed to intervening in the command of Army Groups, Armies, etc. with individual orders that were not at all within his competence. ... In contrast to Hitler's tendency to issue detailed orders, which as a rule only hindered command and caused damage, there was his reluctance when it came to broad operational directives. The more he considered the principle of "hold at all costs" as the alpha and omega of his art of command, the less he was willing to give far-reaching directives that took into account a development of the operational situation that was usually foreseeable. He did not want to admit that, with the methods of command he had adopted, he would ultimately find himself lagging behind the enemy. His confidence prevented him from granting freedom of action to his subordinate commands with general directives, a freedom of action that they could have used differently from what he intended. In doing so, however, he undermined, to a greater or lesser extent, the very foundations of the authentic art of command. He also undermined and debased it, we might add, by devoting himself to specific problems that distracted him from other more pressing tasks that would have been much better dealt with locally and by technical experts. If we move from the cases of Hitler and Stalin to those of Churchill and Roosevelt, the picture changes considerably, but in some respects it also remains unchanged. Roosevelt had no military training, whereas Churchill did, even if it dated back largely to the First World War, so that, for example, as he frankly acknowledged in his war memoirs, he did not initially realize the decisive strategic importance that the air forces had assumedand underestimated the strength of the Luftwaffe. Thanks in part to the democratic regimes of England and the United States, which did not give them the powers that Stalin and Hitler had and allowed their general staffs to exert much more influence than their Soviet and German counterparts, Churchill and Roosevelt, as "military leaders," made far fewer mistakes than Stalin and Hitler. However, they too interfered and interfered considerably in the conduct of military operations, in the choice of commanders to whom to entrust individual fronts and operations, and in many military matters. They too, albeit in a less obvious way and above all without reaching the extremes of Stalin and Hitler, harbored a certain towards their military collaborators (and Churchill even had a sort of sense of superiority that sometimes led him to entertain reckless projects, such as when, after the German attack on the USSR, he wanted to land in Norway, or overly grandiose and unrealistic ones, such as when, in the

autumn of the same year, he thought he could destroy the Italian-German forces in North Africa, thus inducing Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco to break away from Vichy and land in Sicily). and, above all, they had a decisive influence on the development of their countries' war strategies, imposing their decisions on the military leadership on the basis of considerations that were essentially, and sometimes exclusively, political considerations and, in the case of Roosevelt (Churchill was a realist, focused on the practical, did not surround himself with advisers who conceived of politics in ideological terms, as were almost all of Roosevelt's, and had no illusions that the post-war problems would be solved in terms radically different from those on which the myths and hopes of twenty years earlier had foundered), including ideological ones. The most striking example of the latter is the determination and firmness with which, until almost the last day of the conflict in the Far East, the Allies insisted on the decision taken in January 1943 at the Casablanca Conference by Roosevelt and Churchill to accept only an 'unconditional surrender'. The issue had been carefully studied in Washington and, at that particular moment, declaring that the Allies would only accept an 'unconditional' surrender from their enemies certainly had political significance and value. It served to downplay the negative reactions aroused in many circles by the 'Darlan affair' and to make it clear to the Germans that Hitler would never be able to obtain a "mild" peace and, above all, to reassure Stalin, who had not wanted to attend the conference, of the Allies' genuine willingness to fight the war to the end, thus persuading him to abandon any idea or exploration of peace with Hitler. However, it was essentially Roosevelt who wanted the declaration, making it an ideologicaland moral issue, was motivated by a kind of deep hatred for Germany and the Germans, and not only for Hitler and Nazism, and considered no price too high to secure Stalin's friendship and cooperation during the war and after. Churchill only learned of Roosevelt's intention during the conference. Personally, he would have preferred that the issue not be raised ("It must be remembered that at that time no one had the right to proclaim that victory was certain. Therefore, the watchword was 'caution'. Personally, I would not have used those words') and, in any case, that the declaration referred only to Germany and Japan, but convinced as he was that at that moment 'any divergence between us... could... damage or even compromise our war effort,' he did not oppose it, merely ensuring that the official communiqué issued at the end of the conference made no mention of 'unconditional surrender'. And when Roosevelt (who would remain a fanatical supporter of "unconditional surrender" almost until his deathbed) spoke explicitly about it during a press conference held on January 24, although surprised and irritated by the American president's coup, he did not react and from then on officially aligned himself with his position and defended it against all criticism from those, not least many military leaders, who, not without reason, considered it more and more an obstacle to a rapid end to the war. If at the beginning of 1943 the demand for "unconditional surrender" had political value and usefulness, after the Normandy landings and the decisive turning point that this marked in the course of the conflict, its value became increasingly negative. It strengthened Germany's will to resist, discouraged those German military leaders who would have been willing to get rid of Hitler and end the war, and thus prolonged it by many months, perhaps by a good year, with all the consequences in terms of German lives, but also Allied lives and those of Jews

massacred in Nazi extermination camps that the prolongation of the conflict brought with it. Not to mention the great territorial, political, and propaganda advantages that this prolongation ensured for the Soviet Union. The same applies to Japan, even though Roosevelt had by then passed away. In his case, Truman agreed with Churchill's suggestion to soften the rigid demand for 'unconditional surrender' and with Attlee and Bevin, who had just succeeded Churchill in those days, to modify it, despite Stalin's opposition, at least as far as the Japanese request that the emperor's sovereignty be respected was concerned. Thus, it is difficult, from a historical point of view, not to agree with Liddell Hart's assessment of the whole question, and therefore also of its more strictly military consequences: The main obstacle the Allies encountered on their path once the balance had begun to tip in their favor was the barrier they themselves had erected: the reckless and short-sighted intransigence with which their leaders insisted on imposing unconditional surrender on the enemy. This was the factor that, more than any other, helped Hitler and those in Japan who were in favor of continuing the war to keep their respective peoples in their grip. If the Allied leaders had been wise enough to give some assurance about the terms of peace, Hitler's grip on the German people would have loosened well before 1945. Three years earlier, representatives of a strong anti-Nazi movement operating in Germany had informed the Allied leaders of their plans to overthrow Hitler and of the names of many senior military figures willing to support the uprising, provided that the Allies gave them some assurances about the terms of peace. But neither then nor later did they receive the slightest assurance, making it much more difficult for them to gain support for what appeared to be a 'leap in the dark'. Thus, the 'useless war' was unnecessarily prolonged, and millions more lives were sacrificed unnecessarily, while the peace that was finally achieved had no effect other than to give rise to a new threat and to bring the clouds of another war on the horizon. In fact, theuseless prolongation of the Second World War... Cologne-Berlin 1967, pp. 171 ff.; A. Hillgruber, Storia della seconda guerra mondiale. Obiettivi di guerra e strategia delle grandi potenze, Bari 1987, pp. 128 ff. B. H. Liddell Hart, Storia militare della seconda guerra mondiale cit., p. 994. The pursuit of "unconditional surrender" by the adversaries proved advantageous only for Stalin, paving the way for communist domination inCentral Europe. To conclude and return from the specific to the general, it should not be forgotten that if the mistakes made by Churchill and Roosevelt were less serious and negative than those made by Stalin and, above all, Hitler, this was due in large part to the moral commitment that Churchill was able to instill in the British people at the most dramatic moment of the war for them and to the greatness of the economic and industrial potential of the United States. Nor can we underestimate the fact that in some cases (and here, among other things, the discussion returns to the operations in North Africa in the spring of 1941 and, albeit in a different context, the following year) the lack of strategic flexibility and the inability to set aside or modify previous decisions in order to seize the opportunity presented by Hitler and the Japanese military leadership, as well as Italy's chronic weakness, also contributed to neutralizing the negative consequences of some of their mistakes. In light of the above, it seems to us that a historical discussion of Mussolini as a "military leader' must first of all take into account two aspects of the problem and distinguish between them: on the one hand, which of Mussolini's military decisions were in

reality only political decisions, the result of his overall war strategy, or of necessity or circumstances of an essentially political nature; on the other hand, how and to what extent he interfered in the direct military conduct of the war. Only after clarifying these two aspects, and without, of course, wishing to in any way absolving the "Duce" of any of his very serious fundamental responsibilities or acquitting him of his mistakes, is it possible to make an effective assessment of the impact Mussolini had on military operations and the mistakes he made. As far as the first aspect is concerned, the argument is simple. The decisions of July-October 1940 were political: d) to reject the German offer to send an armored contingent to Libya to reinforce Graziani's army, b) to participate in operations against England by sending an Italian air corps to the English Channel and a group of ocean-going submarines to Bordeaux, c) that of October, again 1940, to attack Greece and, finally, d) the decision, the following year, as soon as he learned of the imminent German attack on the USSR, to participate in operations against it with his own expeditionary force. Badoglio's dismissal and his replacement with Cavallero was also a political decision, but of a different kind, so much so that it seems more appropriate to include it among the cases relating to the direct military conduct of the war. After what has already been said about Mussolini's concept of the 'parallel war' and the reasons which, in our opinion, led Mussolini to attack Greece, we will not dwell on the first three of these decisions. However, it is appropriate to make a few observations about the fourth, even though the previous chapter has already explained the reasons why the "Duce" was essentially in favor of the German attack on the USSR and wanted Italy to participate with its own military contingent. That the dispatch of the CSIR and then thethe Armir had extremely serious consequences in terms of human lives sacrificed and resources (especially vehicles and artillery) taken away from the North African front is beyond question and does not even need to be dwelled upon. The point that deserves further consideration is the transition from the relatively modest commitment (albeit still heavy in terms of resources) represented by the CSIR (approximately 61,000 men, 5,500 vehicles, 147 artillery pieces, etc.) to the much heavier one of the Armir (about 227,000 men, 16,700 vehicles, 588 artillery pieces, etc.). In the case of the CSIR, Mussolini played not only an active but also an autonomous decision-making role, while in the case of the Armir, his role was only partially active and, above all, not autonomous. The German attack on theUSSR did not lead Mussolini to believe that the war had entered a radically new phase and that it would be long and hard; as has already been said, he only realized this at the end of October 1941 and, above all, towards the end of the, when it became clear that the Germans had not succeeded in defeating the USSR and the conflict had spread to Japan and the United States. As soon as he heard of the attack, he decided, as has already been said, that Fascist Italy, the forerunner of the anti-Bolshevik struggle, could not fail to participate. This was an idea that he would never abandon, so much sothat even on March 9, 1943, when the Armir would practically no longer exist and the Supreme Command was preparing to order the repatriation of the surviving units, he wrote to Hitler that the army corps would be reorganized and rearmed on site because "Italy cannot remain absent from the Russian front." The first contingent, the CSIR, was thus entirely his own initiative, not requested by the Germans and, all things considered, not even particularly welcome to them. Apart from the fact that at that time Hitler felt confident of knocking the USSR out of

action in a few weeks and considered the German and Eastern Allied forces sufficient to achieve his objectives, much more so than Italian help (which, moreover, caused significant problems in terms of transport and supplies). The OKW considered it necessary for the Italians to concentrate their forces in North Africa. This, it should be noted, was not because he was thinking of a large-scale operation in Egypt (which Hitler did not want, hoping that, once the USSR had been defeated, London, 'taught a lesson' by having lost its last European ally on which it could rely, would agree to negotiate with him and, therefore, he was not interested in putting it in too much difficulty, let alone to Italy's sole advantage), but because he did not want to run the risk of having to deprive himself of new forces and materials to help the Italians and because he considered that Italy's main task at that moment was to monitor French North Africa in case the British, taking advantage of Germany's commitment in the east, attempted some direct or indirect action there, and to replace some of the German troops in the Balkans and Greece with his own troops, thus making them available for the eastern front. Despite the lack of interest shown by the Germans and the clear tendency of the OKW not to want to take on, or even discuss, any commitment to the Mediterranean before the conclusion of operations in Russia ("it is not timely to establish, before the Russian campaign is over, the common war plan of the Axis powers against British positions in the Mediterranean" Keitel wrote bluntly to Cavallero at the end of July), even before the CSIR came into play (between the Hungarians and Romanians, whom the OKW wanted to avoid coming into direct contact, given the state of tension between Hungary and Romania over Transylvania), Mussolini wanted the Supreme Command to prepare a second dispatch ("we cannot be less present than Slovakia"), to which the Germans were initially strongly opposed, especially since the Italians were asking them to supply the vehicles1. However, this German attitude began to change in October; firstly because of their hopes of pushing into the Caucasus and beyond, which the favorable start of the offensive launched that month opened up for them, and secondly because of the dramatic situation in which they found themselves in Russia with the onset of winter. This led to a growing interest on their part in Italian military support (initially mainly in the form of Alpine divisions to be deployed in the Caucasus, then for any type of troops), which was evident in the changed tone Hitler used when writing to Mussolini on December 29. Whereas until then the Führer had remained vague and had made no secret of his lack of interest in direct Italian participation in operations against the USSR, considering it more appropriate for Italy's potential military power to remain concentrated in the Mediterranean, he now demanded it in no uncertain terms: Preparations for the continuation of the war of annihilation in the spring are underway. I believe that the total annihilation of thewas to remain concentrated in the Mediterranean theater, he now requested it in no uncertain terms: Preparations for the continuation of the war of annihilation in the spring are underway. I consider the total annihilation of this enemy, Duce, to be one of the most decisive prerequisites for the final victory in this war. I am therefore very grateful to you, Duce, for spontaneously offering to deploy two more Italian corps to the eastern front. This will make it possible to form a complete Italian army, to which I will also assign the necessary German formations if necessary. However, Duce, I would like to take the liberty of suggesting something to you right now: namely, that the

transport of these divisions should take place before the beginning of the snow melting, because once it starts, any movement will be impossible for a period of four to six weeks. I believe it is necessary to resume the offensive immediately at the beginning of the dry season. Considering the requests he had made up to that point, Mussolini's response on January 23, 1942, to these warm and positive expressions was, all things considered, rather cold. He confirmed that the Italian divisions were dear to the CSIR, which would enter the line the following month, and that he could prepare "in case of necessity" a third (ddi, s. IX, VII, p. 392). Then, on August 26, when he met him in person during his trip to the Eastern Front, he told him that he could 'send another six, nine, or even more divisions'. Although he said he greatly appreciated it, Hitler declined the offer (ibid., p. 508). With Göring, on January 28, 1942, in Rome, Mussolini spoke of nine divisions in total: the three from the CSIR, three that 'will begin to leave in mid-March' and another three, 'mainly Alpine', "later" (cf. ddi, s. IX, Vili, p. 233). Cf. ddi, s. IX, VII, p. 494 (Keitel-Cavallero conversation, August 25, 1941, morning). The first request to send Alpine troops to the Caucasus was made personally by Hitler to Ciano on October 25, 1941, when the latter visited his headquarters (see ddi, s. IX, VII, p. 693). Hitler returned to the issue in his subsequent meeting with Ciano in the last week of November (ibid., p. 801). ddi, s. IX, Vili, p. 77. no "in preparation," but did not specify the number or the date on which Hitler could count on them for his offensive resumption. he left the matter to the Germans: "we just need to solve the transport problem"... \ The fact is that for about three months Mussolini had realized that the war in the East would be much longer and more difficult than he had initially believed, and even before the conflict spread to Japan and the US, he had begun to get irritated and impatient with the Germans' delays and failures to deliver supplies and supplies (on February 20, according to Ciano, in a fit of rage he went so far as to say: "Among the cemeteries, I will one day have to build the most conspicuous one: that of German promises. Nothing or almost nothing that was promised has been given to us") and for their perseverance, despite the protracted operations in Russia, in not wanting to discuss, let alone make commitments for those in the Mediterranean. Something in this sense already transpires between the lines of the letter he wrote to Hitler on November 6, even before the British resumed their offensive in Marmarica and the crisis in supply traffic to Libya reached its peak. However, what is more useful for understanding the new position that Mussolini was developing is what can be read in a draft letter, also to Hitler, which Cavallero (who had already drafted most of the previous one) had prepared for him on December 3; according to his reconstruction, the fact that the letter was not sent (probably, first as a result of the surprise announcement of Japan's imminent intervention given to Mussolini that same day by the Japanese ambassador, then as a result of the easing of the crisis in supply traffic and the arrival of the German air force in Sicily) is in fact secondary. What matters is that the letter, on the one hand, explicitly stated that the "final outcome" of the war could only be achieved through a "joint effort," and, on the other hand, clearly implied that victory in the Mediterranean was no less important than that in the Aegean. Reinforcements are absolutely essential in order to be able to face an offensive recovery by the enemy, which must be considered imminent, and to restore a minimum of supplies that are now almost completely exhausted. These imperative needs clash with the situation of our transports across the Mediterranean, which

has arisen as a result of the formidable increase in means of attack against our traffic in the Mediterranean by the enemy. Faced with a total requirement of 120,000 tons per month for Libya's overall needs, excluding the transport of new units, we were only able to transport 40,000 tons in November, while the battle has multiplied consumption and therefore a transport of at least 150,000 tons would have been necessary. The penultimate convoy of seven ships, including two oil tankers, was completely sunk despite being accompanied by a very strong escort; of thethe last convoy of five ships, three were sunk (including a large oil tanker), one was diverted to Greece, and only one was able to reach Benghazi. The arrival of the 20th Air Force will undoubtedly bring about a great improvement in this situation, and the naval and submarine assets that you have ordered to be sent to the Mediterranean will also be of great benefit. The personal action of Marshal Kesselring will also be of great use, whoseI consider to be an act of great generosity on your part, Führer, also because of the great specific experience that the Marshal brings with him. But I believe it would be very risky to assume that with these means the Mediterranean problem can be solved to such an extent as to give us the necessary peace of mind for our transports to Libya. In my opinion, the problem of our transports in the Mediterranean must be considered in the following terms: the situation of our troops in Cyrenaica has become critical, and the problem of their immediate supply of food is urgent, within a matter of weeks, perhaps days; theThe enemy is able to increase its means of attack against our traffic almost indefinitely, as we increase our means of protection; in this situation, I must consider that the German troops, like the Italian ones, despite having victoriously overcome the enemy's attack, may find themselves in danger at any moment, with consequences that need not be pointed out; this being the case, the need to open the Tunis and Bizerte route to traffic has become not only imperative but absolutely urgent. I am well aware, Führer, that this problem of the route to Tunisia has been one of your concerns for a long time and that difficulties of various kinds have so far prevented its resolution, even though you have long been committed to this goal. However, in the current situation, I believe that every effort must be made so that, as soon as possible, at least the materials needed for Libya, including heavy weapons, i.e., artillery and tanks, can be transported via that route, except for the transport of men by air. At present, and for a period of time that cannot be predicted, we are forced to limit our traffic with Libya to the very little that can be transported by exceptional means, namely submarines, destroyers, and a few cruisers. The materials transported are food, certain types of special ammunition, and fuel, in the minimum quantities necessary to prevent our troops from being completely paralyzed, but with each passing day, the situation becomes more and more serious. I am certain, Führer, that I am not appealing in vain for your intervention in this matter, which is so vital for the conduct of the struggle in the Mediterranean, the outcome of which is closely linked to the future conduct of our war operations. For this joint effort, I am arranging, in relation to your recent conversation with Count Ciano, to set up an Alpine army corps composed of our best troops, and a corpsmountain infantry corps which, together with the CSIR, fully replenished with men and equipment, will be able to make a vigorous contribution by the Italian armed forces to the continuation of your magnificent advance to the Caucasus and beyond. Only by maintaining our positions in Libya and preparing the basis for our future action there will it be possible to achieve the final result from our joint

effort, to which the inevitable victory in the Mediterranean will definitively open the way. I would be grateful, Führer, if, sharing as I hope the point of view that I felt necessary to present to you, you would be willing to intervene to give the problem of the route to Tunisia the urgent solution that our delicate situation in Libya requires. I remain, Führer, with the sentiments of my comradely friendship and loyalty. eastern front and, in another sense, it established, without obviously arriving at an explicit quid pro quo, that Mussolini could not afford a significant link between the Italian request to have "at least the necessary materials for Libya, including heavy weapons, i.e., artillery and tanks" and that of Alpine troops for Russia made by Hitler to Ciano at the end of October and again at the end of November. This is all the more so given that everything confirms that by December 1941 Mussolini was no longer thinking of sending new troops to the Eastern Front beyond those he had already committed, and which he needed to demonstrate "with facts" his anti-Bolshevik commitment. Nor can it be completely ruled out that even in sending these, he no longer (or allowed Cavallero not to show) excessive zeal; the order to prepare the Alpine divisions was in fact only given on February 12, 1942, three and a half months after Hitler's first request, and at the urging of von Rintelen, and the departure from Italy of the first of the two army corps destined to form, with the Csir, the Armir, began only in June, well after the date "suggested" by Hitler, despite German pressure. That said, let us now turn to the problem of the actual conduct of operations and the part played in it by the "Duce.". Legally, Mussolini's position was different from that of the other "military leaders" we have mentioned and also from that of Hitler. As Hindenburg's successor as head of state, Hitler formally held supreme command of the armed forces and, in February 1938, after the resignation of von Blomberg and von Fritsch, he had also assumed effective command. After von Brauchitsch's resignation in December 1941, he had also assumed supreme command of the Army. Mussolini was Minister of War, Navy, and Air Force, and at the time of Italy's entry into the war, as already mentioned, he had been entrusted, by delegation of the sovereign, with "command of the troops operating on all fronts." The concrete meaning of this delegation had been clarified by Badoglio as early as June 4, 1940, in a communication addressed to the four chiefs of staff, Undersecretary Soddu, the Viceroy of AOi, the senior commanders in North Africa and the Aegean, and the ministers of Foreign Affairs and Italian Africa. In the first part, it specified the terms of Mussolini's relationship as Chief of the General Staff and the latter's main functions: The supreme commander of each and every branch of the armed forces, wherever they may be stationed, is, by delegation of His Majesty the King, the Duce. The Duce exercises this command through the Chief of Staff, who has his own General Staff. The main functions of the Chief of Staff General are: to keep the Duce informed of the general military situation of the various armed forces and, in relation also to the enemy's situation, of their operational possibilities. To take the orders and general directives for the conduct of operations; to issue to the Chiefs of Staff of the various armed forces the consequent orders and directives for the conduct of said operations in the strategic field; to follow the development of operations, intervening when necessary, especially to ensure the coordinated and timely deployment of the armed forces. The second part was dedicated to the command of the chiefs of staff and senior commanders of the armed forces stationed overseas "on the basis of the orders they will receive from the Duce as supreme commander

and from the Chief of Staff'. The third concerned the organizational tools that the General Staff would use to fulfill its tasks. Finally, the fourth and last summarized the principles on which the Supreme Command was based: a unified and totalitarian concept of the command of the armed forces exercised, by delegation of His Majesty the King, personally by the Duce; strategic conduct of the war and coordination of action between the various armed forces and between the various theaters of operations, exercised, following the orders and directives of the Duce, by the Chief of Staff; t) command of the various armed forces stationed in Italy or overseas, exercised by the Chiefs of Staff or senior commanders of the armed forces; d) absolute dedication and obedience to the Duce and intimate fusion of thought and action in all, according to fascist custom and style. Despite its schematic nature, the document clarifies two issues of fundamental importance: d) the "Duce" was responsible for "orders and general directives for the conduct of operations"; b) the Chief of Staff was responsible for issuing orders and directives "for the conduct of said operations in the strategic field," following their progress, and ensuring coordination between the various armed forces. At the end of June 1941, the 1927 law regulating the office and powers of the Chief of the General Staff, to which Badoglio's communication-clarification was linked, was replaced on Cavallero's initiative by another which, according to some authors, established the principle that Mussolini could not issue orders except through the Chief of the General Staff, so that Cavallero could finally fulfill his role as effective commander "with a minimum of independence, at least in theory," and would restore to the military leadership "the role and responsibility that belong to the head of the armed forces in wartime," so that Mussolini would have lost direct control of the armed forces and, from that moment on, he would refrain "from direct intervention in operational commands." In reality, the new law largely mirrored that of 1927 and reaffirmed the direct dependence of the chief of staff on the head of government. Compared to the previous situation, the authority and powers of the latter were certainly (and rightly) extended and strengthened (albeit less than Cavallero would have liked), but only in relation to other military authorities and bodies and with the aim of improving the functioning of the Supreme Command and, in practice, finally establishing it, certainly not in relation to Mussolini. It is impossible to claim that the new law deprived the "Duce" of direct control over the armed forces, just as it is impossible to say that, in promoting it, Cavallero was motivated not only by military considerations but also by political considerations (or ambitions) of a political nature. As for the fact that by mid-1941 Mussolini had greatly reduced and almost ceased the Hierarchical and technical structure of the Supreme Command DUCE [commander of the troops operating on all fronts] CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF Private Secretariat GENERAL ATTACHÉ

DEPARTMENT II DEPARTMENT — Operations Office — Order and Additions Office — Situation Office Press and Propaganda Office — Services Office — Fuel and Transport Office War Potential Office Eastern Chessboard Chessboard Africa Section Navy Section Air Force Section Organization Section Training Section Historical Section Situation Section Bulletin Section Press and Censorship Section Propaganda and Foreign Liaison Section Assistance and Internal Liaison Section Balkan Section Eastern Section Eastern and Metropolitan

Territory Section Africa Section Fuel Section Transport Section Armaments and Motor Vehicles Raw Materials and Air and Sea Materials — Office of the Secretary to His Majesty

— Personnel Office — General Affairs Office — Cipher Office L Headquarters

f Personnel Section ^ Rewards Section x Legal Section Prisoners Section Statistics Section s General Affairs Section SIM

Treaties and Conventions Section Finance Section

Wire Section Radio Section Secret Communications and Coordination Section his more or less chaotic and petty military interventions, it can be ruled out that this depended on it. In Storia di un anno (History of a Year), discussing the last meeting of the Grand Council on the night between July 24 and 25, after having, not by chance, recalled and extensively quoted Badoglio's communication of June 4, 1940, and, as we shall see, having tried to deny that he had requested the delegation of command of the armed forces and to attribute the initiative to Badoglio, Mussolini wrote: That is how things stand. Mussolini never technically directed military operations. It was not his job. Only once did he replace the technical staff, in the absence of Cavallero, and that was during the air and sea battle of June 15, 1942, which took place in the waters off Pantelleria. That clear victory belongs to Mussolini, as was recognized in a major report to the officers of the Seventh Naval Division by the Chief of Naval Staff himself, Admiral Riccardi, in Naples, before Mussolini rewarded the officers and sailors who had particularly distinguished themselves in that battle, during which Great Britain 'felt the bite of the wolf of Rome in its flesh for the first time'. Falling ill in October 1942, Mussolini considered leaving the military command, but did not do so because he felt it would be unseemly to abandon ship in the middle of the storm. He waited to do so after "a sunny day," which has not yet come. We believe that there is nothing more to add on the question of command. Like many of Mussolini's statements, this one is only partly true. It is true that he never 'technically' directed operations; even in the only exception he admitted (and boasted about), it cannot be said that he did so. On the occasion of the so-called 'mid-June operation' (i.e., the air and sea interception of two British convoys from Gibraltar and Alexandria that were supposed to supply Malta), his 'command' was much more political than 'technical', since it essentially consisted of ordering, on June 12, after speaking with Admiral Riccardi, who had outlined the problems that would arise from an intervention by the fleet given the 'tragic' shortage of fuel, that the fleet should set sail: if the British naval forces were coming towards the central Mediterranean, the Italian naval forces could not remain in port. The consumption of fuel oil was therefore justified. However, it is not true that he never interfered with his interventions either in the Supreme Command or in

individual subordinate commands in the conduct of military operations. And not only on matters of practically no importance, but which so irritated Badoglio and his close collaborators that they felt their professionalism was being undermined, sometimes forgetting that Mussolini had behaved in the same way in other circumstances and they had had no objections, a typical example being the daily war bulletin that Mussolini wanted to be submitted to him in advance and often corrected personally, as he had already done during the war in. Especially in the early months of the conflict, roughly until the spring of 1941, his interventions were in fact quite numerous and often far from insignificant. Sometimes they were direct and personal, sometimes they were made through General Soddu, who was Badoglio's "right-hand man" on his staff until he went to Greece right-hand man until he went to Greece. We must try to be as precise as possible about these interventions in the early months of the war, both to assess their scope and consequences and to distinguish them from subsequent ones and understand how it was possible to think that the entry into force of the new law on the chief of staff wanted by Cavallero made them much less numerous and fraught with negative consequences. Even though he listened to everyone and then often decided differently from what he had discussed with them, Mussolini often attached importance to personal relationships and the human sympathy that his interlocutors and collaborators inspired in him. The cold Badoglio, full of himself and lacking in any communication skills, did not inspire any human sympathy in him. He felt that Badoglio regarded him with the typical condescension of a "professional" towards the 'amateur' and, moreover, he distrusted him politically and considered him an opportunist. The same can be said of the marshal's closest collaborators, who, to a greater or lesser extent, he saw not only as 'hardline Badoglians' but also as 'sons' and epigones of those 'old' generals who in 1915-18 had done nothing but leave Italian soldiers to rot in the trenches and be massacred in frontal attacks. This led to an intimate attitude of distrust and impatience and, therefore, a sort of desire for revenge against them (and those who, not being considered by him in the same way, gradually disappointed him and appeared to him to be of the same ilk, as in the typical case of Graziani), which prompted him to keep them under constant control and infiltrate them with his own men (Soddu in Rome, Pricolo in Albania), to underestimate their technical arguments and to replace them, to bypass them. Added to this psychological attitude was his conviction that the war would be short, so it was not worth dealing with issues and deficiencies that would not have had time to manifest themselves to the point of affecting its course and which, if addressed, would have raised a series of problems that he preferred not to deal with at that moment (a typical case was the lack of coordination and collaboration between the Navy and Air Force and their resistance to submitting to the Supreme Command). and that military operations had to be carried out (often at that time engaged in difficult operations) in order to deal with the material conditions of the troops (barracks, comfort supplies, etc.). See, for example, U. Cavallero, Diario cit., pp. 17 ff. It should also be noted that fewer generals commanding large units were relieved of their command than in 1915-18. Two tables from the Presidency of the Council show that between June 1, 1940, and February 15, 1943, three army generals or designated generals (U. Soddu, M. Berti, S. Visconti-Prasca), 7 division generals, and 4 brigade generals were dismissed and placed in the reserve or on full leave. In total, 38

generals ceased to hold command, but not all of them were dismissed; some took on other commands or assignments or were placed at the disposal of the ministry. Some who were initially dismissed were subsequently assigned to a new command (acs, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Cabinet, 1940-1945, phase. 16/2 6 9 915). No data has been found for the Navy and Air Force. A note to the Duce from General Pricolo shows that in the spring of 1941 Mussolini wanted to retire General Fougier for a series of deficiencies that had come to light, but he then accepted Pricolo's view that it was sufficient to place him on leave for some time (aussma, Carte Pricolo, b. 1, fase. "C.A.I."). About six months later, Fougier was appointed undersecretary and chief of staff of the Air Force in place of Pricolo (who saw this as a maneuver by Ciano and Cavallero). See F. Pricolo, La Regia Aeronautica nella seconda guerra mondiale, cit., pp. 316 ff. See Q. Armellini, Diario di guerra, cit., pp. 45 ff. and 51; G. Ciano, Diario cit., pp. 451 ff. Mussolini was incredibly weak towards the Navy, to the point that one wonders whether his excessive acquiescence towards it and his lack of intervention in its conduct of operations can be explained not only by his conviction that the war would be short, but also by a sort of inferiority complex towards the laconic and haughtily self-assured Admiral Cavagnari, a figure with whom he felt even less comfortable than with Badoglio, but for whom he had no political suspicions. In order to understand the conduct of the Navy's operations and, more generally, its relations with the other branches of the armed forces and with the Supreme Command itself, we believe that, in addition to its strategic concept, two other elements should be taken into account: a strong sense of inferiority towards the British Navy, which was present in most of the senior officers (see, for example, Traffrail [h. t. dorling], Il Mediterraneo occidentale 1942-1945, Rome 1953, p. 29), which was matched by an equally strong sense of superiority towards the Army and even more so towards the Air Force. As already mentioned, Mussolini's first directives in view of the intervention (March 31, 1940) called for the Navy to launch an immediate "offensive across the board in the Mediterranean and beyond." Badoglio had raised no objections; it was Cavagnari who, both at the Supreme Command and in a memorandum sent to Mussolini, had argued that the situation for the Navy was "worse" than in September 1939 because Anglo-French forces in the Mediterranean were increasing and "one fleet will be stationed at Gibraltar and another at Suez, we will suffocate inside"; if they then went on the attack, there would be heavy losses on both sides, "but our enemies would have a much wider margin to cope with the damage and to make up for the wear and tear of their resources." Hence his conclusion: "since there is no possibility of achieving strategic objectives or defeating the enemy naval forces, it does not seem justified to enter the war on our own initiative, with the prospect of having to remain on the defensive even at sea." And he had practically never moved from this defensive perspective. As he had already anticipated to Raeder a year earlier in Friedrichshaven, for Cavagnari the only basic strategy could be "defensive on the right and left; to control the Sicilian Channel," or, as stated in the strategic directive issued on May 29 (the so-called di.na.o.), "to secure our communications with Sardinia, Libya, and Albania and to strive to maintain some communication with the Italian islands in the Aegean," "prevent the two major adversaries from joining forces, making the most of the Strait of Sicily for our maneuvers," act "with insidious and light forces" in the waters of enemy bases "in conjunction with air attacks on the bases

themselves" and against the enemy's most important lines of communication, "seize and exploit every opportunity for partial clashes in conditions of superiority or equality of forces.". The Navy held firm to this strategic vision (which Mussolini and Badoglio, in July, had ended up adopting in a dynamic rather than substantially static sense, as Cavagnari had intended) not only after the capitulation of France had greatly reduced the enemy's potential, but also after the entry into service, in August, of the Littorio, the Vittorio Veneto, and the modernized Duilio determined a balance of forces entirely to its advantage, thus allowing those "three decisive months" between August and November to pass, if not in complete inactivity, then certainly in a series of purely defensive operations characterized by extreme tactical caution in the face of the enemy. During those months, as Admiral La Chino wrote, "it could reasonably count on success, being in a position of numerical and qualitative superiority." This attitude was certainly influenced, as Admiral Cunningham wrote in his memoirs (L'odissea di un marinaio, op. cit., p. 86), by the outcome of one of the very first engagements, that of Punta Stilo on July 9. In fact, it "had an effect [on the Italians] that was completely disproportionate to the damage" suffered and made the Navy even more reluctant to engage fully, even when (at the end of August and beginning of September) the British fleets from Gibraltar and Alexandria pushed into the Sicilian Channel and reached Malta to resupply the garrison. To Mussolini's indignant protests and his order to "give battle" (see G. Ciano, Diario, p. 363, September 7, 1940), the Navy General Staff responded by reiterating its point of view and shifting the responsibility for its inaction onto the Air Force, and in particular onto the deficiencies of aerial reconnaissance (which Cunningham, L'odissea di un marinaio cit., p. 81, considered "very efficient"), and, incredible as it may seem, on the British ability to conceal their intentions. Very significant in this regard is a memorandum dated September 22, 1940, which must have been agreed upon with Badoglio (who had suddenly converted to the thesis that one should "follow the path taken so far") and which he sent to Mussolini with the clear intention of indirectly responding to his criticism and his order. In fact, it stated, among: "If we had superior forces, we could resolve the problem of communications security with Libya once and for all by facing or, rather, provoking a decisive confrontation with the enemy. But the relative strength of the existing forces does not allow us to adopt such an operational concept. Even with equal losses, we would remain in a position of inferiority, because we have no reserves, nor can Germany give us aid at sea by sendingreinforcements to the Mediterranean, nor does it have sufficient forces to tie up large parts of the British fleet in the North Sea. Under these conditions, we must seek out the difficult opportunities to fight with parts of the Alexandria fleet, , accepting combat with all of its forces only when the general course of the war requires it, especially since we must always bear in mind that there is another fleet in Gibraltar and that permanent indirect protection of communications with Libya is possible only because of the very existence of our main naval forces, whose mere potential presence already acts as a brake on the enemy's initiative. The implementation of these criteria requires, on the one hand, that our fleet always take to sea with all its forces assembled and, on the other hand, that all sources of information on the enemy's movements function quickly and reliably., our fleet must always take to the sea with all its forces assembled and, on the other, all sources of information on enemy

movements must function quickly and reliably. Among these sources, aerial reconnaissance holds the first and irreplaceable place.The enemy's initiative, whether for the purpose of operating behind our eastern Libyan front or for the purpose of damaging our unloading ports, has so far manifested itself in ways that have created serious difficulties for the timely intervention of our naval squadrons. British forces generally take to the sea divided into three or four groups at moderate speed (15-16 knots on average), at considerable distances from each other and with initially divergent coursesinitially divergent courses, so as to make it difficult to assess the forces at sea and not to give away the purpose of the. The groups reunite on their final course during the night. Supermarina has always found it very difficult to form an accurate picture of the enemy's intentions because, due to a shortage of aircraft, aerial reconnaissance has never been able to explore the sea comprehensively and for a sufficiently long period of time, and because it has not always been possible to carry out timely reconnaissance of Alexandria in order to deduce by difference the size of the forces that had left the base. Under these conditions, it is therefore very difficult to decide on the timely departure of our fleet. essentially a function of supporting his political strategy and that, therefore, it was up to him to decide on them, depending on the circumstances and their functionality with respect to that strategy, without realizing that certain decisions were technically useless, inappropriate, even counterproductive. From this dual perspective, almost all of Mussolini's military interventions in the early months of the conflict can be seen. The most challenging ones, such as the sudden decision to go on the offensive on the French front, after having supported the opportunity not to move until the day before, and therefore without sufficient preparation (and, moreover, modifying the attack plan in consultation with Soddu but not with Badoglio), and the minor ones, less fraught with negative consequences, but which, due to their frequency, heterogeneity, and uselessness, created confusion and irritated and depressed not only Badoglio's staff, but also many other military personnel. That said, it must also be said that with the end of 1940 and the beginning of 1941, these interventions became less frequent and, with the end of the Greek campaign, ceased almost completely. It is absolutely impossible to attribute this to the "Cavallero law." Ceva's explanation is also unsatisfactory, according to which, "once Albania was over, the war took place in areas far from Rome (North Africa, Russia) and under German command (nominal and effective command in Russia, non-nominal but still effective command in North Africa), so that the Duce's 'incursions' would have been practically impossible, even ifhe had wanted to carry them out."2 Apart from any other consideration, accepting this would in fact amount to denying any significance to the numerous conflicts between the Supreme Command and Rommel, and in some cases the OKW, which punctuated the conduct of the war in 1941-42. and its most appropriate course of action" (ACS, Min. Marina, Cabinet, 1934-1950, b. 17 8, "Considerations on the strategic situation in relation to operations in Egypt"). For the time being, Mussolini did not follow up on the matter: however, when in November the British put the backbone of the fleet out of action at Taranto, his first thought was to dismiss Cavagnari, who was replaced byAdmiral Riccardi. However, the replacement (which he had considered but not implemented at the end of October 1939) did not bring about any substantial changes in the strategic vision and conduct of operations. German suggestions to carry out offensive strikes against British

traffic betweenEgypt and Greece went unheeded (as did subsequent suggestions to prevent the re-embargo of British forces that had occupied Crete). In February, the Gibraltar squadron was able to advance undisturbed to Genoa and bomb it, hitting thirty-two steamships in the port, damaging industrial facilities, and causing, in addition to extensive damage to the city, 144 deaths and 272 injuries. at the end of March, at Cape Matapan, the Italian fleet finally suffered its heaviest defeat of the entire war (see Sme Uff. Storico, Diario storico del Comando Supremo cit., I, 2, p. 181; Sme Uff. Storico, Verbali delle riunioni cit., I, pp. 38, 40, 52, 54 ff.; Uff. St. Marina Militare, La Marina Italiana nella Seconda Guerra Mondiale cit., IV, 1, passim and spec. pp. 196 ff.; XXI, 1, pp. 313, 3 51 ff. and 352 ff.; A. Iachino, Tramonto di una grande marina, Verona 1959, pp. 167 ff., 184 ff., 248 ff., 313 ff.; F. Mattesini, Il giallo di Matapan. Revisione di giudizi, 2 vols., Rome 1985). See the outbursts of Q. Armellini, Diario di guerra cit., pp. 96, 113 ff. and 161 (September-November 1940). L. Ceva, La condotta italiana della guerra cit., p. 36. operations in North Africa. As usual, in our opinion, there cannot be a single explanation, but, on the contrary, several factors must be taken into account. A first important factor is what could be called the "Cavallero effect," seen from two different but converging perspectives in terms of its effects. The first is that immediately connected with the removal of Badoglio (and the part of his 54th Division most closely linked to him) from the Supreme Command and his replacement, especially when this became effective after the end of the war against Greece, with Cavallero. Having got rid of the marshal, Mussolini felt more at ease and ultimately more secure, all the more so because Cavallero appeared to him to be a 'different' chief of staff, unconnected with the old military coteries, even unpopular with them, dynamic and modern, and thus inspiring in him a confidence that he had not felt towards Badoglio. Nor can we underestimate the fact that Cavallero was, in character and culture, completely different from Badoglio, and Mussolini had a kind of human sympathy for him, which counterbalanced the he had not had in Badoglio. Nor can we underestimate the fact that Cavallero was, in terms of character and culture, completely different from Badoglio, and Mussolini had a sort of human sympathy for him that counterbalanced his fundamental distrust of those who belonged to the 'military caste'. The second perspective is more technical and more closely linked to the 'Cavallero law' or, rather, to Cavallero's establishment of a genuine Supreme Command, which Badoglio had lacked but had not really tried to establish. As Ceva observed, with Cavallero, the Supreme Command effectively became a presence that was felt in all operational sectors, in every branch of the military organization and, in general, throughoutthroughout the civil, industrial, and economic structure of the nation at war. Similarly, Cavallero succeeded, if not in resolving, in setting on a course more responsive to the gravity of the moment various issues that had hitherto weighed negatively on the conduct of operations, made it difficult to take decisions and ensure their implementation, had been sources of disharmony between the military ministries and the Supreme Command and of conflicts and petty jealousies between the various branches of the armed forces, and, as a result, had encouraged all kinds of interference. All these things increased Mussolini's esteem for Cavallero and contributed to his placing in him the trust that he had not had in Badoglio and to interfering much less in his work. Another equally important factor was was Mussolini's gradual realization, as the prospect of a quick and militarily easy

conclusion to the conflict faded, that it was essential for him to devote himself fully to the political management of the war and, above all, to relations with Germany. He also became more or less aware that, at this point, he could only rely on the military, and primarily on Cavallero, for the military side of things. The first push in this second direction camethe campaign in Greece. In its early stages, his interventions and interference were still very numerous, but as Italian defeats multiplied, their number began to decline. Although he was frantically committed to following the evolution of the situation almost hour by hour and did not give up on having his say, thus often contributing to aggravating it (a typical example is his insistence on sending in more and more troops, with the result that, given the limited capacity of the Albanian ports, they became congested and the troops sent in could only be deployed in small numbers), after Badoglio's dismissal and Cavallero's dispatch to Albania, began to realize that he could not direct operations from Rome and that he did not have the technical expertise to do so. Hence his gradual reduction of his "command functions" to more limited areas and, all in all, more political than strictly military. This, let's be clear, does not mean that he did not occasionally indulge in some military raids. executive" (cf. L. Ceva, La condotta italiana della guerra cit., pp. 56 ff. and 158 ff.). At the same time, the 'Duce' ordered the conversion of the transatlantic liner Roma into an aircraft carrier (VAquila, which had not yet entered service on September 8, 1943). In truth, Mussolini had already taken an initial decision to this effect on January 20, but had had to abandon it due to 'technical" objections from the Navy (see A. Santoni, Da Lissa alle Falkland cit., p. 169). Despite the clear orientation of the Supreme Command and Mussolini, and although, after the destructive action of the British torpedo bombers against the fleet in Taranto, even the great admiral Thaon di Revel had declared himself, in a memorandum written for Mussolini, in favor of a more aggressive attitude ("better that ships perish in combat on the open sea than passively at anchor"), Cavallero achieved minor results with his efforts to persuade the Navy not to limit its activities substantially to the protection of communications with Libya. This was certainly a very important activity, but one that alone could not ensure control of the Mediterranean, so much so that the Navy was unable to hinder (as had happened in early May and would happen again in July, August, and September) the movement of British convoys and the flow of supplies to Malta, or to prevent the British from dealing serious blows to transports bound for Libya (see A. iachino, Tramonto di una grande marina cit., pp. 262 ff.). More than Cavallero's efforts, the relative dominance of the Italian fleet in the central-eastern Mediterranean between January and October 1942 was the result of external factors and, as far as the Navy was concerned, was attributable not to greater aggression on the part of surface naval forces, but to the activity of assault vessels, submarines, aircraft, and mines. The German air and naval contribution was particularly decisive, responsible, among other things, for the torpedoing of the Barham and the Àr£ Royal (see A. Santoni F. Mattesini, La partecipazione tedesca alla guerra aereonavale nel Mediterraneo (1940-1945), Rome 1980), theaction in December in which assault vessels put the Queen Elizabeth and the Valiant out of action in the roadstead of Alexandria, and Japan's entry into the war, which prevented the British from replacing their lost ships and, indeed, forced them to transfer some of them from the Mediterranean to the Pacific. Mussolini's behavior during his long inspection of the Greek-Albanian frontfrom

March 2 to 20, 1941, is proof of this. Both in his various meetings with the commanders of the divisions and army corps he visited and in his meetings with Cavallero and some of them, Mussolini almost never went into detail about operations or gave orders. He asked for explanations and information on individual situations and issues, declared himself ready, even when not asked, to send new divisions from Italy, but he did not try to impose his point of view or force them to take action at any cost (and, indeed, on March 14, between Geloso, who wanted to insist on action, and Gambara, who was of the opinion that it should be suspended, he ended up accepting the latter's opinion and told Cavallero to give the troops three days to rest and reorganize) even though his most fervent desire was to finally "wring the Greeks' necks," redeem Italy's national honor and military prestige, and achieve success "before Germany's intervention," "because otherwise the Germans would have every reason to say that the Greeks had surrendered thanks to them.". The reports of the meetings held during those days with the commanders on the ground are eloquent. Mussolini's leitmotif was always the same: politically and morally, it was necessary to achieve military success before the German attack, in practice by the end of the month. It was therefore necessary to persist with offensive actions. However, he never really went into the merits of these. On the evening of March 12, taking stock of the situation in Devoli on the front of the VIII Army Corps with General Geloso, he expressed himself in the following terms: It is therefore positive that Fazione must continue. How must it continue? That is a technical problem, and so I will not go into that question. I note, however, that the ridge of q. 1308 is not suitable for infantry. Furthermore, we must ask ourselves whether the attack of one division can really give us possession of this ridge and whether the necessary sacrifice is not excessive. And, not venturing into personal assessments and leaving operational decisions to the Supreme Command and the local commands, he expressed himself in the same way on March 20, during the last meeting (with Cavallero, Messe, Geloso, Rossi, Gambara, Ferrerò, and Mercalli), also in Devoli, before returning to Italy. The action on the 9th of this month, he said, came as a surprise to me. I had no illusions that strategic successes would be achieved; but I did not rule out a satisfactory tactical success. The plan was well thought out; the artillery fire was well organized; the logistical preparations were in place. How did it happen that the divisions had such little penetrating power? This is a problem that you must study. What happened? I rule out a collapse of morale. I saw a large number of troops on the move; I saw divisions heading towards the line: excellent. So there was something that you technicians must clarify. Eight regiments that fail to make an impact on the enemy's defenses pose a problem whose determining factors may consist of artillery fire, lack of training, technical details to be reviewed, difficult terrain, and difficulties arising from the Trebescines fire that were not previously anticipated. Therefore, while maintaining the offensive in that sector (it is impossible to mount an action in Corciano in time given the snow and the insufficiency of the Alpine forces; so the 9th Army must act only in the event of enemy collapse), the causes of the failure to penetrate in the first phase must be reviewed in order to remedy them. As for the date, the Germans have informed us that they will attack in early April, giving us six days' notice. It is therefore necessary for us to strike a blow against the Greeks at any cost; otherwise, history will say that a small nation such as Greece failed to defeat Italy, but it will

also say that Italy failed to defeat Greece. The military prestige of the Italian nation is therefore at stake. Before the Germans fire the first cannon shot, it is necessary to inflict a defeat on the Greeks. The Italian people would rebelat the idea that its army was unable to defeat the Greek army. All this would not have been possible in the past; today there are masses of men and a complete organization for functional life. You must make everyone understand this and ensure that the battle that will begin at the end of the month is a success. The Greeks must be repelled and pursued. Then he limited himself to asking a few questions, listening to the answers and opinions of those present, leaving it up to them to study what needed to be done, and finally reiterating what was now his true and only concern: As for the timing, I insist on the need to attack before a single cannon shot is fired by the Germans. Everyone must know that the greatest determination and maximum energy are required. The Germans will have no difficulty in defeating their adversary with the 14 divisions already in place. Our time is limited. Our commitment is imperative. We must strive for victory with all our strength, so that we can say that we have defeated the Greeks. No one should rest on the conviction that Greek depression and German strength will settle the matter. That would be detrimental and would weigh heavily on Italian history for a long time. We must convince the Italian people that we defeated the Greek army. If that happens, we will be able to shape the territorial situation in a very different way than we would have without our success. At stake here is thethe military honor of the nation, which, in the eyes of the world, is the only honor the nation has. We must always give the soldier the feeling that we are victorious; when he does not retreat, the soldier must always consider himself victorious. It is unacceptable that we are not capable of giving the Greeks a beating. By attacking on April 1, we will have enough time to do so. I could, if necessary, ask Hitler to delay his action by two or three days. No more. Nor did Mussolini deviate from this more cautious and realistic attitude (remember Faldella's judgment) after the conclusion of theGreek experience. From mid-1941 onwards, his involvement in military matters was limited to a few sporadic and insignificant cases, and it was Cavallero who essentially exercised command, albeit in close contact with him and in particular circumstances on his behalf. So the discussion of Mussolini as a 'military leader' can now be left aside, leaving aside the more strictly political aspects and the more trivial ones that are not relevant to it or are devoid of real significance, we can now focus on the most important issue of the entire period from the spring of 1941 to the summer of 1942: the role he played in the decision, in June 1942, to postpone the occupation of Malta for the time being in order to continue offensive operations in Egypt beyond Sollum and towards the Suez Canal. It is in this regard that the discussion of Mussolini as 'military leader' takes on depth and historical significance (from both a biographical and historical point of view), and the behavior and choices of 'Il Duce' acquire a concreteness and greater weight than those who ended up giving them little importance due to a judgment vitiated by the double premise, which was correct but in this specific case insufficient, that by then, after the American intervention, the Axis could no longer win the war and that Italy's inferiority and subordination to Germany were such that Mussolini was forced to resign himself, willingly or unwillingly, to German decisions. In reality, the issue is more complex and involves the question of how Mussolini, not only during this period but from the beginning of the conflict, adapted

military operations to his own Mediterranean strategy. The center of gravity, the decisive theater of war, was, as has been said and repeated, to be the Mediterranean for Mussolini. What was supposed to be the mare nostrum was in reality a prison in which Italy languished and would languish more and more as its population grew. Gibraltar and Suez, as he recalled in his report to the Grand Council on February 4-5, 1939, were its outer gates, its "sentinels"; Corsica, Tunisia, Malta, and Cyprus were equally "bars of this prison." Corsica was "a gun pointed at the heart of Italy," Tunisia "at Sicily,", while Malta and Cyprus constituted a threat "to all our positions in the central and western Mediterranean" and pushed Greece, Turkey, and Egypt, "states that were virtually enemies of Italy and its expansion," "to join forces with Great Britain and complete the political and military encirclement of Italy." Since Italy "cannot have and does not have any continental objectives of a European territorial nature, except for Albania," the objective of its policy could only be to break the "prison bars" and "march to the ocean.". Logically, and from a military point of view in particular, of all the "bars," the first to be broken should have been Malta, if only because of the threat it posed to communications between Italy and Libya. And, in fact, in 1935-36, at the height of tension caused by the war in Ethiopia, thethe possibility of an operation against Malta was considered, and the Navy studied it again in 1938-39, contemplating both the possibility of occupation and that of its neutralization by the Air Force. In reality, however, Mussolini never really considered the problem of Malta. Psychologically, he felt more concerned about Tunisia and possibly Corsica; politically, first the hope of reaching a "general agreement" withEngland for the Mediterranean, then the conviction that the war was now won and would last very little, made it seem of secondary importance: Malta must have seemed to him like ripe fruit destined to fall into his basket inevitably and quickly, without him having to make any effort. This explains not only why he did not listen to Göring, who suggested that he occupy it by surprise instead of formally declaring war on England and France (something he would never have done, both for the sake of Italy's "good name" in the world and so as not to compromise his hoped-for role as mediator with such "incorrectness"), but also why there was no mention of the occupation of Malta in the instructions he gave to Badoglio in anticipation of entering the war. Nor, for that matter, had the problem really been felt by the military leadership. The importance of occupying or at least neutralizing the Maltese archipelago from the early days of the conflict had been well understood by Pariani; after him, however, it had been underestimated, so much so that in the meetings held by Badoglio with the chiefs of staff on April 9 and May 6 and 30, no one had raised the issue, and in the meeting on June 5, when Oraziani had asked whether "attempts to land on Malta," it was quickly dismissed. Cavagnari hastened to say that the coast was unsuitable and heavily defended, and Badoglio, responding to Soddu and Oraziani, who had proposed studying the question anyway, said with ill-concealed irritation: "All right. Study it for every eventuality. Remember that we must never think that the enemy is stupid. By now, he more or less knows that we are entering the war and is preparing accordingly. As far as we know, only the Navy had prepared its own study, which was fairly accurate but essentially negative, as is clear from the conclusions it reached: "Given the exceptional difficulties of the undertaking and the forces that would have to be dedicated to it, it would only be justified if Malta represented a decisive objective. However,

since England had long since given up using it as its main base of operations, the threat that Malta could pose to our communications and naval bases is of secondary importance. It is sufficient that, with aerial bombardments, submarine ambushes and (when necessary) night cruises by torpedo boats, it continues to be impossible for important naval forces to remain in Valletta, that the movement of the few that are there is threatened, and that the island's supply. Malta will fall into our hands as a consequence of the final victory, achieved by concentrating all our energies on the chessboards containing decisive objectives. In reality, the difficulties of the undertaking were much less than the Navy claimed, so much so that among the British Chiefs of Staff Committee, which believed that nothing could be done to defend Malta, and Churchill (backed by Admiral Cunningham), who was determined not to give up, there was and still is a clear divergence of opinion. However, the conclusions reached by the Navy were sufficient to shelve the issue: at the meeting with the Chiefs of Staff on June 25, Badoglio dismissed it with just two sentences: If no more planes take off from Corsica against us, Malta must be "sterilized." On the first day of good weather, carry out a large-scale action so that the British understand that Malta cannot serve as a bridgehead. From that moment on, for more than a year, the occupation of Malta was no longer seriously considered by the Supreme Command and, as far as we know, by Mussolini. This was despite the fact that the 'sterilization' carried out by the Air Force and the German Air Corps had not produced the desired results and the Navy had not been able to prevent the Mediterranean Fleet from supplying the island, so that by early 1941 it had achieved such a capacity for resistance and offensive autonomy that it was a real thorn in the side of the AxisAxis; so much so that, in February-March, a plan for an airborne landing in Malta had been prepared in Germany, and Admiral Raeder had tried unsuccessfully to convince Hitler of the need to tackle the problem radically. In Italy, in May (partly on the wave of euphoria following the successful conclusion of the Greek campaign), General Guzzoni asked the general staff of the three armed forces to study 'our operational possibilities" for a possible occupation and to present them to him as soon as possible; but that was all. Malta, to use the image Roatta had used on May 19, during the first meeting of the chiefs of staff held by Cavallero, who had now returned from Greece, was "a porcupine" and the undertaking appeared "very difficult." And Mussolini, who, after the victorious Italian-German counteroffensive in Libya in March-April, was already thinking "of the march towards the Delta," was looking much more to Crete (and then Cyprus) than to Malta, so as to establish "a single bastion as far as Rhodes" and project itself towards the Middle East. For the question to be finally reconsidered, it took the serious difficulties in which the Italian-German forces in Libya found themselves at the end of 1941, the dramatic progress of the crisis in the supply traffic necessary to sustain them, and the impossibility of remedying it as the Supreme Command and Mussolini would have much preferred, albeit for slightly different reasons via Tunisia. A report by von Rintelen to the OKW on April 2, 1942, states that the Italian Supreme Command (Cavallero?) had admitted to him "the big mistake made in not starting the war with the conquest of Malta, and is now trying to draw the consequences of this recognition." Nevertheless, at the end of 1941, the prospect of an operation against Malta appears in all the available documentation taken into consideration by the Italian side almost obtorto collo] not on the basis of an overall strategic vision of the

war in the Mediterranean, but as a harsh necessity imposed by the unfavorable course of the war itself; and, moreover, cherishing the hope of finding a way to avoid it, by resolving the situation in some other way. Typical in this regard are two statements by Cavallero preserved in the Diario storico del Comando supremo (Historical Diary of the Supreme Command), one with Admiral Riccardi on December 13, 1941, on the need to attack Gibraltar "to solve the Mediterranean problem," and the other, eleven days later with Roatta: "Since Malta cannot be taken, Gibraltar must be taken.". It is also significant that in August the Supreme Command began to discuss the matter again (and Cavallero also discussed it with Mussolini on September 3 and with the king the following day), the first directives, still concerning only the selection of specialized personnel for risky operations to be assigned to the units that would participate in the eventual action and the start of "studies and tests on similar islands,", were only given by Cavallero to Roatta starting on October 12, after hopes of being able to use the Tunisian ports had faded almost completely. It was Mussolini who broke the deadlock, given the British counteroffensive, Rommel's plans to retreat to Derna and even further west, and the picture of the situation given to him by Cavallero ("if we don't bring two divisions, we will lose North Africa, and if we lose Africa, we lose the war") had thrown him into the deepest despair. But even he, mind you, after still hoping to obtain Hitler's help to induce Vichy, by hook or by crook, at this point he cared little, to make the Tunisian ports available to the Axis. This is proven by the dramatic letter he wrote to Hitler on December 29: The battle that has taken place in Cyrenaica in recent weeks has ended without winners or losers. We would certainly have wonif we had been able to transport the men and equipment necessary to sustain the battle. The outcome of the battle was compromised at sea, not on land. The loss of the entire convoy of seven ships on November 9 was very serious, but no less serious was the loss of two ships on December 14, ships carrying German and Italian tank units, which were sunk by a submarine in the Gulf of Taranto. The last convoy of four ships arrived, but to protect the 20,000-ton shipment, we had to deploy 20,000 tons of warships. This requires such a consumption of fuel that it is now prohibitive for us to maintain a simple resistance in Tripolitania, unless we open up the route to Tunis, which is infinitely more economical in this respect. At the time of writing, the enemy's intentions are unknown. Will they be content with their success and, given the situation in the Far East, limit themselves to strengthening their position, or will they attempt to break through our newly established defenses and target Tripoli? To avoid the dangers that lie ahead, in order to secure Tripolitania and resume thethe initiative, the problem of the Tunisian bases is absolutely fundamental. I do not need to explain to you the enormous advantages that would accrue to the Axis from the full use of the Tunisian bases. I assert that the strategic situation of the Axis would be reversed. While our traffic in men and arms would be almost undisturbed, the enemy's traffic would be literally strangled. The consequences of this would be incalculable, as incalculable as the consequences of the loss of Tripolitania. There are only two ways to achieve our goal of having free use of the French bases in Tunisia: either through agreements or through force. Naturally, we must do everything possible to achieve this through an agreement. France will not give anything for nothing. It will demand concessions in the armistice and certain military facilities for its defense. I firmly believe

that the game is worth the candle. Through the Tunisian bases, we could bring to Africa all the forces necessary to resume the march towards Egypt and, if necessary, to cooperate with France in the face of Anglo-American reprisals in French Morocco. If the French reject even the most generous agreement, I declare, Führer, that I would rather take the armored divisions to Tunisia than see them disappear at the bottom of the sea on the route to Tripoli. In general, I think we need to find a way to clarify France's attitude towards us. I would be delighted, Führer, to hear your thoughts on the matter. It was only after the failure of this step that, on January 18, 1942, Mussolini, who was well aware that Kesselring also considered the occupation of the island to be the only way to truly resolve the situation in the Mediterranean, decided, in agreement with Cavallero, to put down on paper the first actual "directives for the fight against Malta" (copies of which were given to Admiral Riccardi, General Fougier, and Kesselring). While waiting to agree on the operation with the Germans and, above all, to convince Hitler to commit to it (and in this regard, it cannot be ruled out that the news of Göring's upcoming visit to Rome contributed to hastening the Duce's decision), the "directives" merely referred to the neutralization of Malta through air and naval action, in which German forces present in the Mediterranean theater would also participate and which would "destroy the enemy air force on the ground and in the air and paralyze the island's air defense," "cut off supplies of material and personnel to Malta by both air and sea" and "make it impossible to permanently deploy naval forces in Malta by means of attacks by heavy combat units on port facilities and on naval and merchant forces anchored in the port." All this, as they began, was intended to "establish sufficiently secure lines of communication from Italy to North Africa and to achieve sea and air superiority between southern Italy and North Africa" and to prevent the British from using Malta for air attacks against Italy and North Africa. However, the studies and preparations already underway or initiated after their issuance leave no doubt that for Mussolini and even more so for Cavallero, the term "neutralization" was equivalent to occupation and that if it was used in the "directives' used it a little, it was to avoid upsetting Hitler by making him feel bypassed in a decision that was also included in the more general 'Direttive del Duce' issued by Cavallero on January 23 (ibid.) and conceived as follows: 'The conduct of the war in Tripolitania depends on the situation in the Mediterranean. It is to be expected that, due to the shortage of fuel oil, convoys will slow down and perhaps be suspended from mid-February onwards. However, it is also to be expected that the effects of the intensified action on Malta will greatly facilitate the already ongoing dispatch of individual ships on the western route; but this means will hardly be sufficient to ensurethe normal supply of the colony, and the dispatch of new troops and new equipment will be ruled out. The following possibilities must also be taken into account: the landing of British and Gaullist troops on the Libyan coast or in Tunisia; the advance of enemy troops in the Libyan Sahara. Therefore, at least until the transport crisis is overcome, it is necessary to keep the forces on the eastern front together in order to complete their reorganization and not expose them to further attrition, which would be impossible to quickly make up for. It is also necessary to economize on resources and supplies in anticipation of the crisis period. With the above in mind, the Duce has ordered that, until further notice: our position of resistance towards the east is represented by the Marsa Brega Marada line; Marada must be reinforced; the general

situation in the Mediterranean does not currently allow us to consider moving our deployment forward; on the position of resistance indicated in point 1), the infantry troops are the element that ensures the integrity of the defense; mobile forces are the maneuvering element, within the framework of the tactical task assigned in no. 4); in order to give our defense a distinctly active character and to disrupt the enemy's preparations for attack, mobile forces will carry out, when the opportunity arises, limited-range offensive operations to defeat the enemy that approaches within convenient range; the air force will cooperate in particular with this task; infantry units must not be diverted from their positions of resistance and must await their complete reorganization there. The Duce reserves the right to modify these directives in relation to possible changes in the general situation. important and to achieve which German help was necessary, and partly because the first objective, before moving on to the actual occupation phase, was neutralization. February, March, and the first half of April were characterized, on the one hand, by increasing air activity over Malta, in preparation for the major attack that began on March 20, which put the island and its defenders to a severe test and even led to talk of its possible abandonment by the British garrison as early as the second half of February; on the other hand, by the discussion and elaboration of general and specific landing plans (at this stage, as we have already mentioned, the Japanese also actively participated)2; and, on yet another hand, by a series of steps, both on the German and Italian sides, to convince Hitler, who was always extremely reluctant to commit himself in the Mediterranean and in favor ofItaly more than was strictly necessary to prevent its collapse and, moreover, after the occupation of Crete, opposed in principle to airborne operations, which he now considered too costly in terms of human lives. On April 13, Cavallero set up the operation's general staff (code-named C3). Kesselring thought of General Loehr as its commander; however, the Italian side did not want to give up command, so much so that, in order to get around the problem, they even considered playing the card of the Prince of Piedmont. What was essential at that point, however, was Hitler's green light. Cavallero and Mussolini were willing to do anything to get rid of Malta; the former was the first to accept, as suggested by von Rintelen, the downsizingthe large-scale operation initially planned to a "coup de main" (which, in any case, would almost certainly have been successful at the end of April, since the situation on the island was desperate at that time); the second to allocate all the necessary resources to it, "even at the expense of North Africa." See H. Lloyd, Briefed to Attack. Malta'spart in African Victory, London 1949; S. W. Roskill, The USAR at Sea, London 1954-56, 2 vols.; 1. S. O. Play Fair, The Mediterranean and Middle East cit., p. M. H. Bell, La défense de Malte 1940-1942, in La guerre en Mediterranée 1939-1945 cit., pp. 257 ff.; as well as W. Churchill, The Second World War cit., IV, I, pp. 340 ff. See M. Gabriele, Operazione Cj: Malta cit., pp. 139 ff. Aussme, Diario Cavallero, April 12 and again May 9, 1942. See 1. Cameron, Red Duster, White Ensign. The Story of Malta Convoys, New York 1960, p. 149. On April 11, Kesselring summarized the actions taken by the Air Corps up to that point, providing the following information. According to the marshal, with three weeks of actions such as those of the previous days, Malta could be completely neutralized (see Aussme, Diario Cavallero, April 11, 1942). 5 Ibid., April 16, 1942. Kesselring personally informed Hitler of Italy's intentions. In addition to being a staunch supporter of the operation, he

knew all the details, having discussed them in detail during the various stages of its preparation, and was able to assess the consequences that the Führer's decision to withdraw part of the air force at the end of the month and send it to the Eastern Front would have. What Kesselring did not know was that in mid-February Admiral Raeder had already explained to Hitler the importance and urgency of occupying Malta in order to achieve victory in the Mediterranean and launch a new overall war strategy that took into account the new situation created by Japanese and American intervention. The Führer agreed with the admiral on the need for action, but reserved the right to reflect further on it, probably as Faldella hypothesised, hoping that air strikes would be enough to resolve the situation and thus render a landing unnecessary. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that this previous step by Raeder (and perhaps also some hints that Göring must have made) greatly facilitated the success of what Kesselring accomplished in mid-April. The marshal was very vague and even imprecise in dating it: On several occasions, I proposed to Göring and Hitler, supported by the Italian supreme command, to attempt the conquest of Malta in order to resolve the Mediterranean question entirely; Rommel had also agreed to the proposal. My plan could only be carried out in February 1942. During a rather heated conversation I had with Hitler at headquarters, he grabbed my arm and said, "Don't worry, Marshal Kesselring, I will act as soon as possible," which shows the difficulties he himself was facing. Much more detailed is the report of the conversation Cavallero had with Kesselring in the early afternoon of April 21 at Ciampino airport, as soon as the marshal got off the plane that had brought him back to Italy: Marshal Kesselring, returning from Berlin, reports that he has informed the Führer of the Supreme Command's intentions regarding the occupation of Malta. The Führer fully agrees with a definitive action against the island and with the "Bereinigung" of the Mediterranean. He is following the development of theaction and will give all possible support for the success of the operation itself, unless British attempts to land in the West occur on such a scale as to require the maximum concentration of forces. In addition to providing two battalions of paratroopers, he will also provide a certain number of light, ultra-modern tanks, particularly suitable for this type of operation. He will also provide General Rommel with 30-40 58-ton tanks of the most modern type, capable of withstanding fire from any field weapon. These tanks should enable General Rommel to break through the stronghold of Tobruk. Marshal Kesselring also points out that he has obtained a certain number of cargo gliders from the Reichsmarschall. When asked by the Chief of Staff how many German air forces will remain in Italy, the Field Marshal replies that he still needs 10-15 days to complete the mass actions currently underway and that they will then be transferred elsewhere: the 770 Ju 88 Wing (2 Groups), 2 fighter groups, and 1 anti-aircraft artillery regiment will be transferred elsewhere. Expressed as a percentage, this represents approximately 30-40% of the bombing forces and 50% of the fighter forces of the forces currently operating. The transfer of the units will take place around the end of the month, when the action will be reduced to maintaining the neutralization achieved and destroying individual targets. In addition, the Field Marshal will leave a group of Me 1 io and Ju 88 in Italy to escort convoys. The Chief of General Staff points out that it is necessary to create favorable conditions for the landing. When that moment arrives, all available Italian and German air forces must be deployed, resuming the

intensity of current actions for a period of 8-10 days. The Field Marshal states that for that specific moment he will bring in from Africa, and perhaps also from Crete, 102 fighter groups and 2 Stuka groups from Africa, and perhaps also from Crete; by suspending the escort of convoys, he will then have forces at his disposal amounting to about 80-90% of the current ones. He believes that a particularly strong action must precede the landing operation and be conducted mainly against field fortifications. When asked by the Chief of Staff General, the Field Marshal replies thatII Air Corps (and General Ramke) will remain in Italy until the end of the operation unless there is an urgent need in the West, as already explained, in which case the stay of the aforementioned commands and related units would be interrupted for about 3-4 weeks. The Führer believes that the British must, willy-nilly and whatever the cost costs, make an attempt to create a western front; this is to prevent Stalin, no longer feeling supported, from deciding to seek a separate peace... Turning to the African front, the Field Marshal believes that, once the 58-ton tanks arrive, it will be necessary to defeat the mobile forces defending Tobruk. The Chief of Staff observes that we are not yet prepared for this action because there are still certain difficulties with supplies. However, after consulting with General Bastico and General Rommel, we will be able to determine the timing of our offensive. It may happen, however, that the enemy will take the offensive in the meantime and therefore, until the moment of our action, we must be ready for a counterattack. The Field Marshal expresses the opinion that if for Malta there is a need to prepare the action in detail, in Africa, if the enemy attacks, we can immediately switch from counterattack to offensive. We must therefore do everything possible to ensure that the operating forces have a minimum of supplies to sustain such an action. General von Rintelen observes that, in his opinion, an action in Africa preceding that on Malta would absorb too many forces, compromising thethe operation on the island. The Field Marshal states in this regard that the first objective must be Malta; if attacked in Africa, one must be ready to counterattack. At this point, all that remained was to formalize everything with the OKW, which viewed the operation with suspicion, fearing that, in Italian hands, rather than resolving the situation in the Mediterranean, it could create new problems or give this theater of war an importance that, given the effort in which the German armies were engaged on the eastern front, it did not want to assume. At this point, Mussolini and Cavallero personally took on the task of playing the decisive game (who had summarized the Italian point of view in two memos, one reiterating the "indispensable necessity" of the occupation of Malta, the other quantifying the forces and resources allocated to it by Italy and those requested from the Germans) during meetings at Klessheim Castle and the Berghof on April 29 and 30. Although he had Kesselring on his side, Cavallero encountered the greatest resistance from Keitel who, hoping to avoid the operation against Malta, said that he would be unable to provide the forces and resources requested before mid-June and that it was therefore "essential to give priority to the action in Libya to destroy the British mobile forces in front of Tobruk." Cavallero, who had argued for the need to occupy Malta "as soon as possible," had no choice but to insist on two dates: the action on Malta could not be postponed beyond mid-July, and the operation in Cyrenaica had to be carried out at the end of May or early June at the latest. All in all, at least in words, Hitler proved more willing than Keitel, even though he too declared himself opposed to postponing the action in Libya

in order to give priority to that against Malta. As can be read in the minutes of the meeting at the Berghof, Regarding Malta, the Führer is of the opinion that it must be taken from the British. His Excellency Cavallero has the Führer read the list of what we have available for this purpose and what would need to be provided by the Germans. The Führer promises to meet our requests and, in particular, to give us 12 T 34 tanks and other very heavy ones (16 weighing 5 tons) taken from the Russians, with which to achieve a complete surprise. A tank of this kind is worth a regiment. For their transport by sea, it will be necessary to modify the self-propelled rafts appropriately. He envisages theoperation based on the use of troops landed from gliders who prepare the landing of paratroopers. With these, we must aim for an airfield, dropping them where the anti-paratrooper defense appears to be weakest, which seems to be near the airport of Ta Venezia (southwest). His Excellency Cavallero assures us that the plan and the definitive requirements in terms of forces and resources are being studied in agreement with our German comrades, who are already working on this and will present their conclusions. These will be examined together with General Flieger Student (XI C.A.). Regarding the date of the operation, the Führer states that delaying operations in Libya would allow the enemy to strengthen itself too much, while the offensive on Malta, if postponed, would not give the enemy any advantage as long as it were kept under constant pressure. It is therefore necessary to carry out the action in Libya at the end of May or early June and postpone the action on Malta until mid-July. His Excellency Cavallero says that the new moon falls around July 13; the operation could be carried out around that time. The Führer prefers to start on the 14th or a few days later. Even if it was a difficult birth, at this point Operation C3 was formally born. This is not the place to follow its further preparation. More important for our discussion is to draw attention to the fact that it was born badly from the outset and, for once, not because of the Italians, but because of the Germans, namely Hitler's and the OKW's stubbornness in postponing it until Rommel's offensive resumed. If the war in the Mediterranean could have a turning point, it would not occur in Africa, but only with the conquest of Malta, a necessary prerequisite for the Axis to set a new course in Africa as well. Unlike Hitler and the OKW, Churchill was well aware of this and, rightly so, he kept insisting in every way possible to Auchinleck that the impossible should be done to prevent the island from falling into enemy hands, since, as he telegraphed him on May 8, its "its loss would be a grave disaster for the British Empire and would probably prove fatal in the long run for the defense of the Nile Valley." With this in mind, he added two days later on behalf of the entire War Cabinet, the Defense Committee, and the Chiefs of Staff, "we are determined to prevent Malta from falling without your entire army first fighting strenuously for its defense. The end of this fortress would mean the surrender of over 30,000 men, including soldiers and airmen, and the loss of several hundred guns. Its possession would offer the enemy a clear and secure bridge for communications withAfrica, with all the consequences that would entail. Its loss would interrupt the route on which both the Middle East and India depend for a large part of their air reinforcements. Furthermore, it would compromise any offensive against Italy and plans for future operations such as V«Acrobat' and 'Gymnast'. Compared to these disasters, we consider the risks you may face for the security of Egypt to be significantly lower, and therefore we accept them. Giving priority to resuming the offensive in Cyrenaica (in the secret hope of

avoiding the operation against Malta) was therefore a mistake, made even more serious by the limited possibilities of thethe Axis to adequately supply and, if necessary, reinforce the troops in Libya and, above all, by Hitler's stubbornness in not backing down from his decision to withdraw and send part of the air forces used in the offensive against Malta to the eastern front. This stubbornness had two very different consequences, but both were decisive for the fate of Operation C3. On the one hand, the slowdown in the air offensive onthe island allowed the British to reinforce their defenses, which were now on the verge of collapse, and, more importantly, to partially reuse it as an air and submarine base from which to intervene both against the supply traffic to Libya and in the battle in Cyrenaica and Egypt. On the other hand, the withdrawal of part of the air force greatly reinforced the considerable fears and skepticism that were already circulating (sometimes to the point of making false claims and suggesting that Malta's defensive capabilities were much greater than we now know them to have been) in military circles and even among political leaders about the feasibility, cost, and therefore the real necessity of such a demanding and risky operation. Some notes from Ciano's diary are significant in this regard: May 13 II Colonel Casero [Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Aeronautics] does not share Cavallero's easy enthusiasm for the attack on Malta. The anti-aircraft defense is still very efficient, and the naval defense is completely intact. The interior of the island is a single nest of machine guns. The landing of paratroopers would be very difficult, as most of the planes would be shot down before they could drop their human cargo. The same applies to landings from the sea. On the other hand, it must be borne in mind that it took only a few days of less intense aerial bombardment on our part to see the defenses tightened. In these latest attacks, both we and the Germans have lost many men. Even Fougier views the possibility of the operation with great anxiety, and German General Lorzer has made no secret of his open dissent. June 20 General Carboni came to Rome to prepare for the Malta operation, which should take place at the next new moon. He is convinced, technically convinced, that we are heading for an unspeakable disaster. The preparations are based on childish ideas and the resources are scarce and unsuitable. The landing troops will never manage to land, or if they do, they are doomed to total destruction. All the commanders are convinced of this, but no one dares to speak out for fear of Cavallero's reprisals. But I am still of the opinion that the operation will not take place. Cavallero was the one who truly believed in the necessity of the operation, and it was no coincidence that Ciano's arrows and slander were aimed at him. His position, whatever Ciano said, was clear: I know it is a difficult undertaking and that it will cost us many losses, and I also know that I am risking my head on this issue. But I am the one who wants it because I consider it fundamental to the progress of the war. If we take Malta, we will have security in Libya. If not, the situation of the colony will always be precarious. I will personally take command of the operation. It is more difficult to determine what Mussolini's true position was. There is no doubt that the idea of conquering Malta tickled his ego, just as there is no doubt that the fact that Cavallero and Kesselring supported it so vigorously and with so many strategic arguments made him confident of the correctness of the decision taken. It is less easy to say whether he actually understood the substance of the strategic arguments they put forward and, therefore, of the absolute necessity that the occupation of Malta should take priority over everything else and that nothing could be attempted or done

without first proceeding with it. This is all the more true when one considers that at that moment his mind was, as has been said, entirely focused on the Middle East and IndiaIndia, and therefore it cannot be ruled out that, considering the Suez Canal to be decisive for his plans to project himself concretely into the heart of the British Empire, he privately considered the arguments of Cavallero and Kesselring to be correct, but excessively exclusive, marred by excessive caution and excessive adherence to the canons of an overly bookish strategy. And with that we come to the decisive point of our argument: why did Mussolini not oppose, or even really try to oppose, Rommel's decision, which, moreover, contravened the plans agreed with the Supreme Command and accepted by him to continue theoffensive in Egypt beyond Sollum, first postponing and then abandoning the conquest of Malta? The events of the war in North Africa from April to November 1942 (that is, until the British Eighth Army forced the Axis forces, which in June-July had pushed as far as El Alamein without managing to proceed further, to begin the retreat that in a few weeks would lead them to cling on for a few more months in Tunisia) are so well known and there is such a vast (albeit of very uneven value) historical and memoir literature reflecting the points of view of all the armies that participated in them that it is there is absolutely no need to go into them; all the more so because, for the purposes of our discussion, what matters is to focus as much as possible on Mussolini's attitude towards them and to establish the weight of his decisions and interventions on them. Having said this, and after what has already been said about Operation C3, a first point of reference is the directives for operations in Cyrenaica issued in full agreement with Mussolini on May 5, immediately after his return from meetings in Austria with Hitler and the top leaders of the OKW and immediately after meeting with Rommel in Libya. These directives clearly established the objective, the timing, and the time available for operations on Tobruk. The objective was to "to defeat the enemy's mobile forces west of Tobruk" and, "in the event of a favorable outcome, [to launch] a swift attack" against the stronghold: The capture of Tobruk is a categorical condition for the forward movement of our forces; if this condition is met, the forces will be moved to the Sollum Halfaya Sidi Omar line, which the bulk of the armored army must not cross. If the occupation of Tobruk fails, the deployment to be assumed after the battle must not cross the Ain el Gazala line. The date was set for "towards the end of May." The time available beyond which operations "could not be prolonged" was set at June 20, "since by that date the air and naval reinforcement units and also part of the air forces currently present in Cyrenaica will have to be withdrawn, all these units being destined for other uses on that date." Finally, the resumption of operations was scheduled for theautumn, when the action against Malta would be over. Rommel began the offensive on May 26, expecting to conquer Tobruk in six days. In reality, things turned out very differently, so much so that Tobruk did not fall until June 21. For Cavallero, the operation had a threefold purpose: to defeat the British, thus preventing them from launching a counteroffensive that would distract forces from theaction on Malta and entailed very heavy risks and consumption (especially of fuel) to supply the troops engaged in countering it; to establish himself in more secure positions from which to threaten Egypt without penetrating deeply into it; and thus engage the British air forces in Africa as much as possible to the advantage of the action in Malta. With this in mind, the slowness with which

Rommel's offensive was proceeding soon alarmed Cavallero, who on June 9 drew Mussolini's attention to the danger that Rommel's offensive would degenerate into a war of attrition that would be unsustainable, both "because normal supplies from the mother country can cover normal consumption, but not the extraordinary consumption of battle', both because of the consumption of fuel oil it imposed on the Navy and because 'by absorbing many Italian and German air forces' it had negative repercussions 'on the neutralization of Malta, navigation in the Mediterranean, and enemy air actions over southern Italy', and on the need therefore, to limit its objective to reaching the Ain el Gazala line, the most favorable in that situation, also in view of a resumption of the offensive after the conquest of Malta. The next day, Kesselring, presenting him with an overly rosy picture of the situation and assuring him that supplies on site were sufficient until June 25, asked him to agree to extend the time scheduled for the offensive and to postpone the action against Malta by three weeks, so as to allow Rommel to launch the decisive attack against Tobruk between June 18 and 25 "with a simultaneous attack in the Capuzzo area and to the east." Cavallero expressed "doubts that, with the prolongation of the fighting in Libya and the postponement of the operation against Malta, the general situation [could] change completely, compromising the operation against Malta," but he ended up accepting the request, obtaining, however, that, whether Tobruk was conquered or not, Rommel would suspend the offensive at the end of June. He became increasingly rigid on this position in the days that followed when, as we have already mentioned when discussing what, according to Mussolini in Storia di un anno, would have been his only "technical" intervention in military operations, the British fleet managed, albeit at the cost of heavy losses, to bring two supply steamers to Malta (four others were sunk), one undamaged, the other damaged and with only part of its cargo. Concerned about this breath ofoxygen that had arrived in Malta, Cavallero persuaded Mussolini to take a stand, confirming the substance of the directives of May 5 (what may appear to be a change, namely that if Tobruk had been conquered by the end of the month, Rommel would not have to advance beyond Marsa Matruh, was in fact Cavallero's way of making clear in advance the maximum limit of the "advances' he had granted Kesselring) and writing a letter to Hitler aimed at averting the danger of new German requests to postpone action against Malta in order to continue the offensive in Cyrenaica and beyond. The letter, which he drafted himself, was worded as follows: Führer, the air and naval battle in the Mediterranean has ended in a serious defeat and heavy losses for the enemy; the same can be said of the operations in Marmarica, which are about to reach their culmination. It is my opinion, and certainly yours too, Führer, that we must consolidate and, as soon as possible, expand the results thus achieved. At the center of our strategic picture is the problem of Malta, on which we took the well-known decisions at the time. I would like to tell you right away that preparations for the Malta operation are well advanced; operations in Marmarica have made it necessary to postpone this action until August, which has been advantageous because in August we will have all the means that have been prepared and built for this purpose, especially the motor barges and other vessels. This Malta operation is more necessary than ever. The truly conspicuous effects of themass air action carried out by the Axis air force, mainly by the II Luftflotte in April, continued to be effective throughout May; but now, in June, Malta, constantly supplied with

aircraft, has regained its offensive war capabilities, so that today our navigation to Libya is once again made very difficult. Now, in order to maintain the results achieved in Marmarica and provide for future needs, it is necessary to be able to carry out the necessary transports with sufficient security. At the heart of these needs is the problem of fuel oil. The recent battle in the Mediterranean prevented two large British convoys from reaching Malta. But thedeployment of our naval forces has imposed a consumption of about 15,000 tons and deprived us of our last reserves. Now our warships have empty fuel tanks and it is not possible to refuel them; a second deployment of our naval forces is not possible at present and therefore, in a new attempt to resupply Malta, we will only be able to oppose limited action by submarines lying in wait and the action, which is not always possible, especially due to weather conditions. I will not dwell, Führer, on explaining the situation regarding fuel oil and the related requirements in detail; these figures are known to your experts who are here with us and are following the problem with equal interest. I will simply confirm thatoperation on Malta is expected to consume 40,000 tons of fuel oil and that this should arrive at least a week before the end of July because during the two weeks before the action, transport will be used for the troops, who must arrive at the last moment. A reserve of 30,000 tons is also required by our Navy to meet naval needs, especially the foreseeable need to deploy naval forces in the face of enemy attempts such as the one currently underway, which I mentioned above. However, I would like to add, Führer, that this operation in Malta will be the best way to solve the fuel oil problem as far as the Mediterranean is concerned, since, once Malta is taken, all consumption will automatically decrease to an extent that cannot be specified today but will certainly be significant. I think that, once the operation has been carried out, this oil problem will have to be re-examined by our experts in order to reach definitive conclusions. I must also add that August is the last time of year that allows the operation on Malta to be carried out; after which we would inevitably have to wait until the summer of 1943, with consequences that you, Führer, are well aware of. The occupation of Malta, in addition to solving the problem of traffic in the Mediterranean (Libya-Egypt), would restore the full availability of our air forces, which are currently tied to the Mediterranean sector and will remain so as long as Malta remains in enemy hands. The release of our air forces, combined with the other advantages of taking Malta, would mean the regaining of freedom of maneuver, a factor of paramount importance for victory. The problem of fuel for the Italian air force must also be addressed in relation to the Malta operation, and in this regard, discussions are already underway between our general staffs. But even in this field, the conquest of Malta will bring relief which, once the operation is complete, it will not be difficult to determine the extent of this relief in relation to the operational plans that will then be formulated. I am confident, Führer, that despite the serious difficulties, of which I am fully aware, your personal intervention will lead to a successful solution to this problem, which is of absolutely vital importance for our situation in the Mediterranean and for its future developments. Both of these events took place on June 20. The next day, however, , something else happened that took everyone by surprise and would have a decisive impact on subsequent events: the defenders of Tobruk (about 30,000 men) asked to surrender. Although no one obviously realized it (Admiral Harvood immediately informed Churchill, who was in Washington at the time, that the situation in

Alexandria had deteriorated so much that, in anticipation of enemy air attacks, he had sent the fleet south of the Suez Canal), for the Axis it was the beginning of the end. Two days later, von Rintelen went to Cavallero, who the day before had reiterated the need to carry out Operation C3, and, informing him that the spoils taken at Tobruk were sufficient to allow the advance to continue, proposed that he repeal the directives of May 5, confirmed three days earlier by Mussolini, and to abandon the operation against Malta. Faced with this double request, with Rommel in pursuit of the British retreating towards Marsa Matruh (which would be occupied by Italian-German forces on the 29th) and, moreover, with an 'assessment of the situation' in Libya and Egypt by the US War Department, intercepted by the Italian services, which presented the situation in the most dramatic terms ('if Rommel intends to take the Delta, now is the right moment'), many of the convictions and certainties of the previous days began to crumble. And they crumbled even more when, on the 24th, Hitler's reply to Mussolini's letter arrived. Dismissing with a few vague and noncommittal remarks the request for supplies that Mussolini had made in his letter and without even mentioning the question of Malta, Hitler took a clear position in favor of the immediate continuation of the offensive in Egypt, describing the results that the Axis would derive from it as "of global importance," using tones and expressions that, knowing Mussolini, he must have considered the most suitable to put him in difficulty and make him accept what he presented as a "request," the "advice of a friend," but in reality was a very specific desire: However, at this moment, which from a military point of view seems to me to be a historic turning point, I would like to briefly explain my thoughts on a matter that may be of decisive importance for the outcome of the war. Destiny, Duce, has offered us an opportunity that will never arise again in the same theater of war. In my opinion, the most rapid and total exploitation of this opportunity constitutes the main military prospect. Until now, I have always pursued every defeated enemy as long and as thoroughly as our capabilities have allowed. The British Eighth Army is practically destroyed. In Tobruk, whose port facilities are almost intact, you have, Duce, an auxiliary base, whose significance is all the greater because the British themselves have built a railway from there almost to Egypt. If the remnants of this British army are not now pursued to the last breath of every man, the same thing would happen that caused the British to miss their chance of success when, having reached a short distance from Tripoli, they suddenly stopped to send forces to Greece. Only this capital error on the part of the British command made it possible for our efforts to be rewarded with the reconquest of Cyrenaica. If our forces do not now press on to the very limits of what is possible in the heart of Egypt, there will be a new influx of American bombers which, as long-range aircraft, can easily reachItaly. Furthermore, this would be followed by a concentration of all the British and American bands that can be gathered from everywhere. In a short time, this would result in a change in the situation to our disadvantage. But the relentless pursuit of the enemy will lead to its defeat. This time, Egypt can, under certain conditions, be wrested from England. But the consequences of such a blow will be of global importance! Our offensive, for which we are paving the way by conquering Sevastopol, will contribute to the fall of the entire eastern structure of the British Empire. Therefore, if I, Duce, in this historic hour that will never be repeated, can give you advice that comes from the most caring heart, it is this: order the continuation of

operations until the complete annihilation of the British troops, until your Command and Marshal Rommel believe they can do so militarily with their forces. The goddess of fortune in battle passes by commanders only once. Those who do not seize her at such a moment will often never be able to reach her again. The fact that the British, contrary to all the rules of warfare, interrupted their initial march on Tripoli to try their hand on another terrain saved us, Duce, and subsequently led the British to their harshest defeats. If we now fail to pursue the British to the point of annihilation, the result will be that we will have a great deal of trouble later on. Accept, Duce, this plea only as the advice of a friend who for many years has considered his destiny inseparable from yours and who acts accordingly. That Hitler had always hoped that theoccupation of Malta could be avoided is beyond doubt. However, there is no reason to believe that, being entirely focused on operations on the Eastern Front, he had previously cultivated grandiose plans for the Mediterranean theater of war and assigned it such an important, in a certain sense decisive, role in his global strategy. The "new" fact, consisting of the intervention of Japan and the United States in the conflict, does not seem to us sufficient to suggest such a radical change in his convictions and strategic conception. This is all the more so since, in that case, it is unthinkable that, despite the constraints Germany found itself in and the need to support first and foremost the effort underway on the Eastern Front, he would not have taken steps to strengthen and resupply a front that had become strategically more important to him. Nor, finally, is his attitude sufficiently explained by the fact that he hoped to reach the Caucasus in the coming weeks. Even if the great diversion to the south that characterized his operations in Russia had been successful, its benefits would not have been immediate: it would have had to be followed by the encirclement of the Soviet armies in the center and north, and as for the crossing of the Caucasus and with it the "fall of the entire eastern structure of the British Empire," it is difficult to believe that he could have considered this possible before the new year. This automatically raised thethe need to reinforce and adequately resupply the Mediterranean theater in the meantime, so as to enable Rommel to face the reinforcements that London and Washington would surely send to the Middle East. The real, decisive reason that had led Hitler to want the offensive to continueoffensive was actually another: it was Rommel's insistence on this, as he said he was sure he could reach Suez and Alexandria in a few days and block the canal, and the great esteem and trust Hitler had in him, which, in his eyes, was confirmed by the fact that the new field marshal (Hitler had promoted him as soon as he received news of the surrender of Tobruk) was ''loved by his soldiers' and 'feared' by the enemy'. There is no doubt that Rommel had great military skills and great courage. However, there is also no doubt that the reputation as an exceptional military leader that accompanies his name is the result of the combination of two opposing propaganda interests: that of the Germans (first to minimize the Italian contribution and then to shift as much of the responsibility for the defeat as possible onto the Italians) and, above all, that of the British, who had everything to gain by extolling his abilities, first to justify their defeat to some extent, and then to make their victory appear more grandiose. More realistically, it can be said that Rommel, while certainly an above-average general with human qualities that made him loved by his men and admired by friends and enemies alike, was not the military genius that was rumored and that even Hitler believed him to be.

Dynamic, courageousand gifted with the so-called 'keen eye' and great inventiveness, thanks to which he was able to resolve seemingly compromised situations to his advantage, more capable in attack than in defense, Rommel was extremely self-confident and stubborn in defending his assessments and decisions with his peers and superiors. As much as possible on the front line with his men, he was, a bit like Hitler, convinced that with willpower everything or almost everything could be done. His desire to be on the front line as much as possible (to galvanize his men with his presence, but also so as not to be easily found by his superiors and thus avoid having to discuss and submit to them) often deprived him of the necessary overview of the situation. Furthermore, when faced with setbacks, he sometimes lost his temper, stubbornly insisting that his initial assumptions were correct and tending to shift the responsibility for his mistakes onto others, often onto the Italian troops. So, while the opinion of some that he was an exceptional tactician but a mediocre strategist, even an exceptional divisional commander who was not up to commanding an entire front, equally excessive is his reputation as a military genius. Apart from some undoubted shortcomings on the strategic level, what made it unjustified, as pointed out by Marshal Alexander, his direct opponent in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia, was his tendency to "over-exploit immediate success without worrying about the future" and his "inaccurate understanding of the importance of a solid logistical base." So much so that, in the final analysis, we cannot disagree with Alexander's assessment in his final report on operations in North Africa and Italy that Kesselring (who was also Alexander's direct opponent during the Italian campaign) "was greatly superior to Rommel in every element of command." The decisive days for the outcome of the war in North Africa and for Operation C3 were June 23, 24, 25, and 26. Faced with the dual request from the OKW transmitted to him by von Rintelen on the morning of the 23rd and Rommel's decision to advance deep into Egypt without taking into account the directives of the Italian Supreme Command, Cavallero, even before Hitler's reply to Mussolini's letter arrived, had to realize that it would be impossible to restrain Rommel and tried to entrench himself on an intermediate line that would at least allow him to "keep Fazione in Malta in check" (feasible, from a meteorological point of view, until around September 1) and to continue to keep the island "under pressure" with the air force in the meantime. To this end, he prepared a "note" for Mussolini, which was intended to act as a partial counterweight to Hitler's letter. According to von Rintelen, who delivered it, this would have been welcome to the "Duce."3; however, it is a fact that on the night of the 23rd, after the letter arrived, Cavallero sent Bastico a telegram that cannot be understood as complete agreement with Hitler's point of view, but rather suggests that Mussolini had accepted the point of view of his chief of staff. The "collapse" of the British, it said, was "much greater than could have been expected" and constituted a new fact that peraussme, Diario Cavaliere, June 23, 1942. aussme, Diario Cavallero, June 1942, Alleniti, "Appunto per il Duce," Rome, June 23, 1942: "Duce, I have examined with my colleagues in the Navy and Air Force the issue of continuing our advance in Egypt. From a strategic point of view, the operational problem remains unchanged—Malta is still at the center of it. The difference is this: instead of the preventive elimination of Malta, its neutralization must be ensured. A To this end, Kesselring can make available a very modest air force from Africa; Superaereo cannot divert anything from Africa, but has units ready in part in Sicily and in

part in preparation for C3; but all this is not enough. We must count on an influx from Germany of the air units already planned for C3. Mar. Kesselring already mentions this in his telegram. Gen. von Rintelen is meanwhile making an initial request to the OKW. The problem will be further discussed with Kesselring and Fougier in Cyrenaica. With the neutralization of Malta, supplies to Libya, now seriously threatened, will be secured, as evidenced by the torpedoing of the m/n Rosselli just today. Then there is the problem of fuel oil, which the Navy is prepared to solve, at least in part, the well-known sacrifice. It remains to be seen whether modest assistance can be obtained from Germany. Rintelen insists on this point; we await the Führer's communications on this matter. The problem of Tobruk has also been examined. That harbor has no docks, only small piers. Maximum unloading capacity under normal conditions is 800 tons per day. I will see what can be done on site to improve this performance. The advance into Egypt raises the problem of Tripolitania. I will report on this separately. B. Even in the operational hypothesis considered here, the preparation of C3 must continue uninterrupted. We will then see what needs to be done.See E. Rintelen, Mussolini l'Alleato, op. cit., p. 160. According to G. Ciano, Diario, op. cit., p. 632, Mussolini was in "excellent spirits" and "preparing to go to Africa." "In truth, he was the proponent of the decisive attack, even against the opinion of the Supreme Command. Now he fears that people do not know and do not dare to take full advantage of the success. His trust is only in Rommel." The note is dated June 22 and is not very reliable. First of all, it should be noted that Ciano himself (p. 631) had noted under the date of June 20 that Mussolini was preparing to go to Africa "if Tobruk is taken" and that he had found him "measured in his judgments and predictions, nor does he indulge in easy optimism." Secondly, the note of June 22 continues in contradictory and far from precise terms: "A calming telegram has already been sent from Rome saying that it is not advisable to push beyond the Forte Capuzzo-Sollum line. There is hesitation, however, about the Malta campaign. Mussolini has written to Hitler that if we do not have 40,000 tons of fuel oil available, the campaign will have to be postponed indefinitely." On June 23, Ciano, referring to the interception of the American "appreciation," he then adds: "Mussolini is naturally pushing for the attack to continueattack" (p. 633); and on the 26th: "Mussolini is pleased with the progress of operations in Libya, but he is very bitter about the fact that the battle is named after Rommel and that it appears to be more of a German victory than an Italian one"; "for the moment, Mussolini is not making any predictions, but he hopes that within a fortnight we will be able to 'make a stop in Alexandria'" (pp. 633 ff.). See min. def. sme uff. storico, Seconda controffensiva italo-tedesca cit., p. 381. put "considering advancing on Egypt"; the "Duce agrees in principle with Rommel's thinking," but "considers that it requires examination of some important issues concerning the Mediterranean theater" and had arranged for Cavallero himself and General Fougier to travel to Libya on the 25th for this purpose. Confirming our interpretation are two notes in the Historical Diary of the Supreme Command, one dated June 23 and the other June 24, which suggest that Mussolini, even after Hitler's letter, was inclined to exploit the situation created by the surrender of Tobruk, but had not yet given up on action against Malta. On the afternoon of the 25th in Derna, Cavallero, who a few hours earlier had once again taken stock of the situation with Mussolini in Grottaglie, first met with Kesselring, whom he knew personally to be at odds

with Rommel and who had always been in favor of action on Malta. Cavallero's diary and that of the Supreme Command have preserved an almost identical account of themeeting, which clearly conveys the drama of the moment and the importance of the decisions to be taken: Marshal Kesselring explained that the situation in the Mediterranean was very serious: six fighter groups and six bomber groups would be needed for Malta; given the situation, it was not possible to withdraw forces from Libya; it was therefore necessary to suspend supplies by sea from Italy to Libya for the time beingItaly to Libya. For weeks, I have believed it necessary to destroy the enemy forces in Libya. While still in Tobruk, I begged Rommel to anticipate further actions to prevent the enemy from escaping. Instead, the enemy is retreating; even today, 2,000 vehicles can be seen retreating. Even if the enemy puts up some resistance, the fact is that we are advancing with ease and, as commanders, we must not allow ourselves to be carried away by this opium. Because the enemy is improving its situation by retreating, while we do not have the means to carry on with the bases. I asked Rommel for 200 vehicles but received no reply. I had to leave part of my forces behind in order to carry on with only light forces and use the units from Greece. Despite this, I believe it is possible to reach the El Alamein line, which takes away all the enemy's. Only light elements can be pushed beyond this line. As for the air situation, he believes that the British air force has suffered heavy losses. But it must be borne in mind that at the beginning of the operationenemy air force was two or three times stronger than ours. The enemy can form a decisive mass against us. The Marshal expects this and fears it. Even if we assume that no reinforcements will arrive, we must reckon with facing about 600 aircraft, against which we can field 60 to 70 German fighters and the same number of Italian fighters, which will be reduced by 50% because, given the means of transport, only half can follow. He told the Führer that the forces that were here were sufficient for the intended objective. Achieving other objectives is not only a question of fuel and bombs but also of forces. aussme, Cavallero's diary, June 25, 1942. Kesselring makes no mention of the meeting in his memoirs. He believes he has presented the situation in a completely objective manner: he does not believe it is possible to go beyond El Alamein, and he feels responsible for this judgment before history. He has already told Rommel and will repeat that our fighters are not capable of stopping enemy attacks at low altitude. In short, he must be wary of a full-scale advance; if he is given , he will obey, but he fears that the campaign will end in that case; if, on the other hand, he stops at the position he has indicated, we will have vast air capabilities against Egypt. In any case, Operation Hercules is 2/3 complete. Finally, he must add that the Air Force has done its duty in this battle and that the successes are not due solely to the 'Panzers'. I take the floor and, on behalf of the Duce, say that the Duce warmly thanks Marshal Kesselring: Tobruk was taken after eight hundred air attacks; the Duce is well aware of this and has asked me to say so. Before examining other issues, I would like to ask a question based on a hypothesis, namely that the leaders decide to go all the way. I assert that in this case the overall operational picture does not change, since Malta remains at the center of the operational problem. There would be no point in proceeding in Egypt if we do not make navigation in the Mediterranean possible, that is, if we do not put Malta under pressure again. In this hypothesis, I examined Kesselring's plan and told Fougier that even if we concentrated all Italian air forces, we would still lack the

forces that Kesselring's plan envisaged would come from Germany. Marshal Kesselring objects that the problem can be posed in the following terms: First case: the advance continues and ends in eight days; during this period, there is nothing to be done in Malta; Second case: the advance stops; action resumes on Malta, supplies are resumed, and the advance resumes with the supplies received. The first case is the only one possible because he believes that we are too weak to fight on two fronts. He has the distinct feeling that continuing the advance will compromise the entire success of the battle. I inform you that we will resume transport with groups of three ships on the Benghazi route and continue air transport. In this way, we can carry on while waiting for pressure on Malta to resume, which can be done within three weeks. Marshal Kesselring insists onexpressing his concern about pushing the units forward in their current condition. The current attacks on Malta are only a nuisance and we do not have sufficient forces to act as we should. I read the summary of Fellers' intercepted message about the situation of the British 8th Army and point out that, once Marsa Matruch is passed, it is possible that everything will collapse. Marshal Kesselring insists that he is not in a position to follow Rommel. Admiral Weichold believes that the Navy can provide support; he considers the proposal to send groups of steamships to Benghazi to be excellent and states that it will also be possible to reach Tobruk, where he believes it will be possible to unload a thousand tons per day. He has alreadyarranged for coastal shipping between Benghazi and Tobruk; the Italian Navy should now take over, as he will provide his own means from Tobruk onwards. As for the new situation in the Mediterranean, he sees the opportunity for a division of cruisers to be deployed to Suda. I inform him that the matter is under consideration but that, as he knows, the difficulties with fuel must be taken into account. The next day, in Sidi el Barrani, Cavallmet with Rommel. After what Kesselring had told him about the impossibility of engaging the air force on two fronts (Egypt and Malta), Cavallero must have resigned himself to accepting the situation created by Rommel, hoping that, contrary to Kesselring's gloomy predictions, things would not turn out so badly. With this in mind, the objective he had to strive to achieve, and which he must have agreed with Mussolini, was to prevent Rommel from advancing beyond the Gulf of Arabi and the El Quattara depression and to avoid the definitive collapseaction on Malta. At least, this is what we can gather from the directives that he sent to Bastico on behalf of the "Duce" and submitted to Rommel. We have two accounts of this decisive meeting which, according to Kesselring, "sealed the fate of North Africa": the one that Cavallero sent to Mussolini during the night and the one in the Historical Diary of the Supreme Command. Cavallero's diary merely reproducesthe telegram sent to Mussolini; Rommel does not even mention it in his memoirs; Kesselring reports what would have been his statement clearly opposed to the continuation of the offensive and adds only two things: a) that after it, Rommel repeated that he "could guarantee that in ten See min. dif. sme uff. storico, Second Italian-German counteroffensive cit., pp. 382 ff. Point 4 of the directives was conceived as follows: "Therefore, the Duce orders: first, to occupy with the bulk of the forces the narrow strip between the Gulf of Arabi and the Quattara depression; this position must represent the starting point for any further action; to this end, first eliminate the fortified camps in the Matruch-Bagush area, annihilating the enemy forces deployed at Marsa Matruch and avoiding proceeding while leaving these squares behind that have not yet been

eliminated; subordinate further advances in force beyond the indicated narrows a) to the situation, especially in the Mediterranean." days would reach Cairo', Cavallero and Bastico had accepted his point of view; b) that, while regretting this (because the conquest of Cairo 'would not have improved the supply situation at all', which 'could only be considered secure after the capture of Alexandria, when the Axis had sufficient forces to oppose subsequent attacks from Aden or Syria' and such forces "did not exist and could not have been brought to the area"), he had been unable to oppose it further "following a peremptory order transmitted to me by Hitler by radio." The most comprehensive account, however, is that provided by the telegram sent to Mussolini, which reads: "Consulted yesterday with Bastico and Kesselring, this morning with Rommel at Sidi el Barrani. A preliminary summary examination shows that the logistical situation and the judgment of the High Command ff. aa. a. s. allow the advance to continue, albeit with serious difficulties, especially in terms of water supplies, which, however, appear to be surmountable. The number of units has greatly decreased in terms of tanks because Rommel rightly wanted to avoid any interruption in the advance and therefore proceeded with the few that were operational. However, he has assured me that within three or four days, recoveries will allow him to bring his forces to at least 200 tanks, while the High Command of the Armed Forces believes it can reach a total of 150 between 'Littorio' and 'Ariete' within the same timeframe. The artillery deployment is still substantial. That said, I must inform you, Duce, that I have found the situation here to be delicate due to the deep disagreement between Rommel and Kesselring, a disagreement that is also personal in nature, which had led Kesselring to a rather pessimistic assessment of the situation, including with regard to the Mediterranean. Having been able to determine the psychological basis of this disagreement, I was able yesterday to correct Kesselring's orientation so that the disagreement could be resolved this morning in a meeting with Rommel. As far as the African theater is concerned, it was important to ensure close coordination between the air force and the ground forces. There was also disagreement on this point, which was resolved on the basis of your directives, which I communicated to Superasi and explained to Rommel and Kesselring, in the presence of Bastico and Fougier, reaching complete agreement on them. on the march. I am alsoof the opinion that it is appropriate to pursue the defeated enemy without pause, but only when we are sure that we are not facing a new adversary. I am competent in matters concerning the air force. My aviators will arrive at the Nile line completely exhausted, with aircraft in need of repair and without the necessary supplies. They will face fresh enemy formations ready for action, which can be reinforced in a very short time. As an aviator, I consider it madness to attack an intact air base. From this point of view, and given the decisive importance of air force cooperation, I am obliged to reject the proposal to continue the offensive with Egypt-Cairo as its objective. The report in the Supreme Command's Historical Diary does not indicate that Kesselring spoke. See A. Kesselring, Memorie di guerra, op. cit., p. 121. The Historical Diary (dated June 26, 1942) offers only a few more elements to better understand Rommel's psychology and intentions. The pursuit of the enemy should have been pushed "as far as possible." The units were "suffering from a lack of water and gasoline, but we cannot stop because of this: those who are behind will close in, those who are ahead will fight." His goal was to reach the El Alamein gap: "a further objective was the

Nile, both to eliminate Alexandria and to reach Cairo," which he intended to reach on the 30th. See min. dif. sme uff. storico, Seconda controffensiva italo-tedesca cit., pp. 383 ff. In summary: take full advantage of the success achieved so far; continue the advance without wasting time, with forces gathered as much as possible, setting as the first objective the narrows between the Gulf of Arabi and the Qattara Depression after the elimination of the defenses of Marsa Matruh and Bagush; this line will serve as a starting point for further advance; it is essential that air units closely follow troop movements and, to this end, both Superasi and the armored forcesmust immediately provide the necessary transport; the situation in the Mediterranean is at the heart of the whole problem; Obs and Superaereo will resume pressure on Malta as soon as possible; in the meantime, transport across the Mediterranean will continue to the extent and by the means that have been determined in Rome and of which I have given notice here. As you are already aware, Duce, the three aviation groups requested from OKW have been agreed upon and will arrive immediately. Kesselring, who, as I said, seemed disoriented to me at first, has assured me that he will devote all his energy to this task. As for the landing points, unloading has already begun at Tobruk; landing craft were already in Sidi el Barrani this morning and are preparing to move to Marsa Matruch. The attack on Marsa Matruch positions will take place this afternoon. We will have news tomorrow. After this first communication, Cavallero sent another to General Magli, of the Supreme Command, to inform Mussolini that, given the situation, there was nothing to prevent him from coming to Libya so that he could be present when the Italian-German troops would, entered Alexandria in a few days' time. He then immediately returned to Rome, from where he sent Bastico and Rommel new and more precise directives that supplemented those of the 26th with what had been agreed in Sidi el Barrani and further specified with Mussolini, who had just returned to headquarters. At this point, our discussion can come to a conclusion. In fact, it is sufficient to devote a few words to the subsequent events of July and August. On June 30, instead of being in Alexandria and Cairo, Rommel was in front of El Alamein with an army or, as his chief of staff, General Bayerlein, would write, with "the remains of an army" exhausted by the fighting in front of Tobruk and the long pursuit of the British in the desert. At first glance, the situation of the latter was certainly not much better; however, in the meantime, they had been able to bring in some reinforcements from the Middle East and, above all, they were able to bring in many more quickly, which was precisely what the Axis was unable to do able to do: the Germans because they were absorbed by the Russian front and even more so because Hitler continued to believe that Rommel was capable of reaching the Suez Canal with the forces he had and those that the Italians would send him; the Italians because they had very few forces and, above all, very few resources to send to Africa; but above all because the British were now regaining air control of the Mediterranean, while supplies from Italy were becoming more difficult day by day due to the shortage of fuel oil, and the OKW was unable and in any case had no intention of giving up its supplies, so much soKeitel had written to Cavallero on June 25 (but even though he did not refer to it, his letter was a response to Mussolini's letters to Hitler a few days earlier) that "on the German side, all possibilities of help have been exhausted." In this situation, trying, as Cavallero did for several weeks, to keep a window open for C3 was nonsense, not only because the OKW did

not want to hear about it , but because the need to supply and reinforce the troops in Egypt was daily depleting the resources and forces that would have been needed to carry it out: aircraft, transport ships, motor barges, and, finally, even the "Folgore" parachute division, sent to the Egyptian desert in mid-July. But it made even less sense to insist, as Rommel did, onidea of advancing beyond El Alamein, engaging in a battle that immediately took on the character of a war of attrition that could only benefit the British and ended up devouring what little the Axis was able to send to North Africa. A 'little' that was, however, a lot for Italy, and in order to get it there, the Supreme Command and Cavallero himself made a huge effort, achieving results that, despite the high price paid, were anything but insignificant. In these circumstances, the only decision to be made, after the attacks in the first half of July had failed to break through the British lines, and certainly after the failure of those launched again by Rommel the following month and the arrival in Malta of a first convoy of supplies, would have been to withdraw from El Alamein, so as to shorten the supply lines, move closer to the landing ports, reorganize the Italian-German Tarmata and give it some breathing space, and establish a line more suited to facing the now predictable enemy counteroffensive, in practice retreating to the Sollum-Halfaya line. And in fact, in the second ten days of July, Rommelseriously. On the 17th, in El Dabà, in the presence of Kesselring, Bastico, and Barbasetti, he discussed it with Cavallero, suggesting "the opportunity to retreat from the El Alamein position, as he could not guarantee that he could wait even a week for the arrival of the promised reinforcements." Although in less explicit and dramatic terms, he returned to the issue two days later, during a new meeting with Cavallero, and on the 23rd in a letter to General Bastico. But to no avail. At this point, the positions had in fact been completely reversed. There was practically no one on the German side to support Rommel. Certainly not Hitler, for whom "the idea of a retreat was absolutely unacceptable" and who "kept his eyes fixed on the Suez Canal" and promised him that he would solve the supply problem in a few weeks. He did send something, but in dribs and drabs and without realizing that the real problem was control of the Mediterranean, without which everything became extremely difficult and costly, and supplies were largely lost or delayed, which affected the entire course of operations. But neither did von Rintelen, too "political" to expose himself to the risk of incurring the Führer's wrath, and even Kesselring himself, partly for the same reasons as von Rintelen, partly because of the bad personal relations between them, partly because he believed that, at that point, a retreat would have jeopardized the advanced camps of the Axis air force and disrupted the aeronautical system that had been painstakingly set up. According to Ciano, "in some circles of the General Staff" a retreat from the front was considered appropriate. However, Cavallero was opposed to it. It is not easy to identify the reasons for this, but the question is important for us because it is closely linked to that of Mussolini's position. A first reason is likely to be found in the difficult, and at times bad, relations between the Chief of the General Staff and Rommel. The two men, who were very different in character, never got along. The German had little regard for the Italians, believing that they were not fully committed to providing him with the supplies, reinforcements, and lines of communication he needed. He often tended to attribute his failures to this and to the "surrender" of the Italian units for his failures, and it cannot be ruled out that he saw Cavallero as an "accomplice" and supporter of Kesselring.

The Italian, in turn, viewed with suspicion the "autonomy" that Rommel took for himself and which, when he deemed it necessary, he had confirmed by appealing directly to Hitler, so much so that at a certain point in August, he obtained permission from Mussolini to reorganize (which, however, caused a series of inconveniences and discontent, even among the Italians, and did not solve the problem) the entire military organization of North Africa so as to place the Italian-German army in Egypt under the direct command of the Supreme Command, i.e., his own. In addition, Cavallero considered Rommel to lack thenecessary balance to deal with such a complex and difficult situation, on the one hand "violent and impulsive," on the other subject to depressive crises, and on yet another too inclined to attribute successes to himself and the Afrika Korps and failures to the Italians. A second reason is likely to be found in the difficult position in which Cavallero found himself. He was opposed by Badogliani, by fascists such as De Bono and De Vecchi, who had viewed his appointment as chief of staff negatively, and by those in the "Ciano group," who considered him a "buffoon" and never missed an opportunity to vilify him and accuse him of everything, not least of having, for the second time after Albania, put Mussolini in an unpleasant psychological and political situation with his optimism, sending him to Africa "to reap a triumph' and instead finding himself in a stalemate. To save his good name and his position, Cavallero could not deny what he had said and done up to that point, could not say he was not confident of ultimate success, could not give Rommel everything he asked for ('our responsibility,' he would say to von Rintelen on August 23 , 'is to provide the means, and if a negative decision is made, we will suspend the action; this does not depend on us") and not show himself to be less determined than Rommel in wanting the offensive to continue, then opposed to abandoning what had been conquered so far without being forced to do so, leaving him responsible for the final decisions; above all, he had to stick close to Mussolini (shifting the responsibility for the "optimism' of Rommel the responsibility for the bad impression made by going to Africa to be ready to enter Alexandria as soon as it was conquered) and the sovereign (who considered him a 'shrewd' but 'professionally capable' man), and whose anti-German sentiments he knew how to stir at the right moment. Although these reasons had some weight, these reasons did not determine Cavallero's opposition to a shortening of the front. The decisive reason was another and of a completely different nature. On June 23, Cavallero, now convinced of the impossibility of preventing Rommel from pushing deep into Egypt, had, as we have already mentioned, sent Mussolini a "note" in which he reiterated in no uncertain terms his conviction that the crux of the matter remained the question of Malta, to which he was closely tied, and now, having accepted Rommel's point of view, even more so than yesterday, that of fuel, which was indispensable for ensuring the necessary supplies for the Italian-German army. From the point of view of the approach, he had written, the operational problem remains unchanged; Malta is still at the center of it. The difference is this: instead of the preventive elimination of Malta, its neutralization must be ensured... With the neutralization of Malta, supplies to Libya, now seriously threatened, will be ensured. To do this, German help was needed, primarily in the form of aircraft and naphtha. The Italians' task would be above all to get supplies to Rommel in Africa. And here the 'note', moving on to the problem of the naphtha needed for their transport and the relative protection of cargo ships, contained a very brief

mention ('... to resolve which the Navy is prepared to make, at least in part, the well-known sacrifice") which shows how Cavallero's position was essentially shared by the Navy, to the point of inducing it to risk "at least in part" the fleet in combat. Cavallero adhered faithfully to this strategic vision in the following months, and it is only in light of this that his behavior can be understood, both his very close collaboration with Kesselring (even if the latter sometimes tended to overstep his bounds) and, all things considered, also with von Rintelen, who, albeit to varying degrees, shared his strategic vision, and his opposition to any idea of retreating from El Alamein. Rommel "at the gates of the Suez Canal" waiting to resume the offensive and, in any case, Rommel at El Alamein, as Hitler had wanted, was for Cavallero the only real leverage he could use to obtain from Germany the aid and supplies that until then the I'okw and Hitler himself had refused or provided irregularly, often in quantities less than promised; the only card to play to induce the Germans to finally recognize the central strategic role of the Mediterranean, which until then they had never wanted to attribute to it; and, therefore, in the immediate term, the only way to obtain from them the air support necessary for the "neutralization" of Malta, the first indispensable step in regaining control of the Mediterranean and securing communications with the Libyan ports, thanks to which Rommel had been able to advance as far as Tobruk in April-May. The historical diaries of the Supreme Command and Cavallero offer countless confirmations and allow for some interesting clarifications. First of all, they clearly show the central importance of the Malta question for Cavallero: September If the Malta problem is solved, all battles will be won. September The hotbeds of danger are Malta and Alexandria. If we reach the Nile, we will have possession of the [Egyptian airfields]. But to do this, we need to advance, and to advance, we need transport, and to have transport, we need to neutralize Malta. ' October If Malta is kept under pressure, we will solve the problem of supplies to the Armored Army and we can bring at least part of the forces planned for Tripolitania... I insist that Malta is the center of gravity of the Mediterranean problem. I am not saying we should destroy it, but keep it under pressure to the point where we can pass. This centrality also explains why Cavallero, when referring to German operations in southern Russia, did not think of their future evolution as a 'pincer movement" from the Caucasus to the Middle East, as Mussolini thought; for him, the emphasis was elsewhere: if the Germans had managed to establish a firm foothold before winter on a Stalingrad-Don-sea line, they could have used the winter break to "converge on the Mediterranean" those forces that Hitler, as we shall see shortly, had promised to send "to a large extent" to Mussolini on August 4, but which had then been reduced to very little. The same sources also reveal a series of continuous efforts he made, with Kesselring's support, from the very first days of July onwards to obtain air units from the Germans to resume large-scale attacks to neutralize Malta. Contrary to his hopes and despite the support of Kesselring,Admiral Weichold (who represented the German Navy in Italy) and von Rintelen, the facts proved Cavallero wrong on almost everything. Neither the OKW nor Hitler were willing to recognize, at least for the time being, a role for the Mediterranean that was, if not central, at least more important than the one assigned to it in the overall framework of their strategy. Until Rommel was at El Alamein and until the Allied landing in French North Africa, were less than what the army in Egypt needed, and the same was true for those that were supposed to serve to

"neutralize" Malta. Not to mention those (resources and raw materials) granted to Italy as such. Only in the very last weeks before the British counteroffensive in Egypt did the OKW become convinced of the need to increase fuel supplies and also undertook to increase them further in the winter months, when consumption by the German armed forces would be lower. Even with the increases established, supplies still remained below what was necessary. It should be noted that in order to carry out all the tasks related to North Africa, the Navy considered in October that it needed 60,000 tons of naphtha per month. Assuming that the Germans actually honored their commitments, 40,000 tons per month would have been available, which would have covered only 50 percent of Africa's supplies, "i.e., only the normal supplies for the armored forces." Everything else would have to be provided by supplies from Romania, which were, however, dwindling. The situation was no better for the Air Force, which had 11,000 tons of fuel per month at its disposal, compared to a requirement of 22,000. In the second half of July, when Rommel first raised the possibility of a retreat, the failure of the "political" logic underlying Cavallero's position was not yet as obvious as it appears to us today, so it is understandable that Cavallero, wholly focused as he was on his efforts to determine a new German attitude, and therefore Hitler's, who would never have accepted the idea of a retreat, opposed it with regard to the Mediterranean theater. What is less understandable is that he himself did not raise the issue at the beginning of September, after the failure ofRommel's offensive at the end of August had failed. Moreover, as we shall see shortly, he would have preferred it to be delayed so that he could prepare it better and had accepted it mainly due to pressure from the Germans and also from Kesselring. Instead, he thought that the offensive could be repeated at a later date, while it should have been obvious to him that time was only working in the enemy's favor and that the crisis in communications withNorth Africa was becoming increasingly serious. Rather than remaining entrenched in front of El Alamein, far from the rear and the ports where supplies were being landed and exposed to the threat of an enemy that was growing stronger by the day with the arrival of new forces and new equipment from England and the United States (about half of the tanks supplied to the Eighth Army were 'Grants' and 'Shermans', and the tactical and strategic air force, i.e. the one that had to operate on the maritime communication lines and across the desert, had a total of about 1,200 aircraft), it would have been much better to retreat to the Sollum-Halfaya line, shortening his lines of communication by 500 kilometers, forcing the enemy to move his impressive logistical apparatus forward and strengthening himself on that line, which was already more favorable than the one in front of El Alamein. Now caught up in the machinery of his Mediterranean strategy and the "political" tactics' tactics, which he believed were necessary to get Berlin to accept it, Cavallero instead engaged in an absurd race against time, hoping that the failure of Rommel's offensive would finally induce Hitler to change course. It cannot be ruled out that this idea was reinforced by the fact that, in order to justify the failure of his offensive and shift the blame onto the Italians, Rommel cited as a decisive factor, when in reality it was only one of many and not the most important one: the fuel crisis resulting from the sinking of two merchant ships used for its transport. That said, it must also be said that at the beginning of November and before the Allied landing in Morocco and Algeria, when the Fifth Army launched its decisive offensive and Hitler

ordered Rommel to "not retreat a single step and throw every weapon and every fighter into the battle" because "it is not the first time that iron will has prevailed over stronger battalions," and Rommel, after vainly attempting to obtain his "approval" for a "maneuver to oppose the enemy and reduce losses,", proved unable to overcome his scruples about the Führer's order. It was Cavallero, in agreement with Kesselring, who gave him that "approval" and issued the directives for the retreat to the Sollum-Halfaya-Sidi Omar line. This was despite the fact that Mussolini had initially informed Rommel that he considered it "necessary to maintain the current front at all costs" in order to allow a first nucleus of resistance to be established on the Sollum-Halfaya line. Having now presented all the available evidence to define Mussolini's position and role, it remains only to draw conclusions. As we have already mentioned, between January and April Mussolini had adopted the thesis of the need to conquer Malta. The only doubt that remains is whether he was truly aware of the strategic value of Cavallero's arguments or whether he simply considered it a first step towards the realization of his Middle Eastern plans, for which he had already considered action on Cyprus the previous year. In the latter case, in fact, one would be justified in thinking thatthe beginning his support for C 3 was not absolute and that, deep down, the conquest of Malta was not his top priority. This would lend credence to Ciano's assertion that Mussolini was not only "the proponent of the decisive attack" against Tobruk but that, once Tobruk had been conquered, he wanted Rommel to exploit the success achieved and had or shared (Ciano is unclear on this point) "hesitations about the Malta campaign." However, the war diary of the German Navy High Command undermines the credibility of Ciano's statement. Under the same date as Ciano's entry (June 22), it reports that Rommel had proposed continuing the offensive, but that "the Duce does not want to give his approval" and requested the forces necessary for the action on Malta. According to the same source, Mussoliniwould only give his approval through von Rintelen on the 25th, after receiving Hitler's letter on the matter. From Cavallero's diary, we also know (although the statement, being four months later, certainly carries less weight) that on October 20, reflecting on his "approval" and what had followed, Mussolini stated that he had made his decision "also following the Führer's news about the collapse of the British 8th Army." So, we believe that the conclusion must be that without Hitler's intervention, Mussolini would have remained firm in his belief that the conquest of Malta should precede thefull-scale offensive towards the Suez Canal. His behavior in August seems less clear to us. And, mind you, not because, faced with the great leap that took Rommel from the Libyan-Egyptian border to El Alamein in about ten days, he too was under the illusion that the Italian-German forces could reach Alexandria and the Suez Canal within a few days. In fact, many people succumbed to this illusion, including those with real military training, so it is hardly surprising that Mussolini also considered success a certainty, especially since Cavallero presented the situation to him in such positive terms that he said he could now go to Libya to be ready to enter Alexandria. The point at issue for us is another and does not concern July but August. Mussolini, as has been said, was in Libya from June 29 to July 20. was in Libya from June 29 to July 20. During this period, he had several meetings with Cavallero and maintained close contact with the Italian commanders on the ground. He was therefore promptly informed of the position taken at the two meetings in El Dabà on July 17

and 19 by Rommel (who, during Mussolini's entire stay in Libya, "never found the time" to meet him) with Cavallero and Bastico. Nevertheless, on the evening of the 19th, he handed Cavallero, who had just returned from the second of the two meetings, a series of 'Considerations on the military situation' that did not take Rommel's concerns into account and, indeed, clearly contradicted them and implicitly buried C3, as they set as the task for future operations the 'battle of the Delta' to be prepared in a very short time: The battle that began on May 26 and can be called the battle of Tobruk, ended in early July in front of the stronghold of Bir el Alamein. It had magnificent results because an entire enemy army was destroyed, but the objectives set as achievable, Cairo and Alexandria, did not fall because the Axis troops, after pursuing the enemy for over 500 km, arrived exhausted. All it took was an air deployment and the appearance of modest fresh forces to stop anadvance that had no reserves to bring into line. The battle of Tobruk is over; tomorrow's battle will be the battle of the Delta. The time to prepare for this battle must be counted in weeks, but we must not waste a single minute in preparing for it in this race for speed that is now underway between the enemy and us. The first "conditio sine qua non" for preparing the new battle is to preserve the current starting points at all costs. Any other hypothesis must be discarded a priori. These first two points were followed by two others, one dedicated to how to "preserve and strengthen the current deployment by rendering the enemy's attempts more or less partially ineffective," the other to the problem of transport (maritime transport to be concentrated on Sollum, Marsa Matruh, and above all Tobruk, land transport to be restored by reopening the Sidi Rezegh Marsa Matruh railway). These were followed by a fifth point dedicated to the 'Second Front', which constituted the general strategic justification in which Mussolini evidently placed the 'Battle of the Delta': The second front is now desperately invoked by Russia and supported by major currents in Great Britain and America. The second front will be created and will have two aspects: the first aerial and is already underway with the massive bombing of German cities. Cologne, for example, has been semi-destroyed, according to the testimony of the German newspapers themselves (see "Berliner Bòrsen Zeitung" of June 30). ... . The other aspect, namely the land front, will not be in Norway or any of the countries bordering the Atlantic, nor even in the African countries bordering the same ocean (Morocco). The second front will be in the Middle East, namely in Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and Iraq, countries where men and equipment can land without fighting, countries that constitute the great crossroads of the British Empire. Imposing masses of men and equipment will be concentrated in this area with a logical and defined strategic purpose: to prevent the forces of the Tripartite Pact gravitating from the north, east, and west from joining forces. The vanguards of these air and land forces are already in place, and others are announced. It would be remiss not to take immediate steps to powerfully defend the gateway to Cyrenaica and, above all, that of Tripolitania, and to garrison both, to the extent necessary, according to the development of events. The next day, Mussolini left Libya and, after a brief stopover in Athens, during which he met with the Greek Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, returned to Rome. From there, on the 22nd, he wrote a letter to Hitler, partly devoted (as we have already mentioned) to the Greek economic situation and partly to operations in Egypt and, in particular, as we have already said, to the 'physical exhaustion of the troops', especially the

Italian infantry, due to the long march in the desert; exhaustion which, in his opinion, was the only reason for the "halt" at El Alamein, so that "if the Axis troops were tired, the enemy was defeated and therefore unable to take any significant action." This assessment was followed by a curt, albeit formally ceremonious, sentence: "Before leaving, I have set out in the paper that I have the honor of enclosing with this letter the instructions to the Commands regarding what needs to be done," namely the "Considerations" written and delivered to Cavallero three days earlier, but not in their entirety, as the point on the "second front" had been omitted. The "main purpose" of this letter, according to Ciano once again, as we shall see shortly, was "to dot the i's and cross the t's regarding the 'Sabratha' division because Rommel had sent a disparaging telegram to Germany 'that Mussolini will never forgive him for'." Hitler replied on August 4 with a letter that deserves careful consideration. Regarding Egypt, the Führer said he completely agreed with Mussolini, endorsed his explanation of the "stagnation" of the advance (and, albeit only tacitly, showed that he also accepted the explanation for the collapse of "Sabratha") and assured him that he would send Rommel "whatever was necessary" to "restore as soon as possible not only the efficiency of the defense, but above all the [...] full offensive strength" of his army. However, this "assurance" was accompanied, on the one hand, by a considerable exaggeration of what Mussolini had written in his "Considerations" about what Italy had to do in preparation for the "Battle of the Delta" and, on the other hand, by a picture of the situation on the Russian front and the difficulties it posed for a massive dispatch of forces and supplies to North Africa. In practice, while Hitler asked Mussolini "to send everything of value to North Africa: support, reinforcements, and replacements," he remained vague about his own part, avoiding explicit commitments as much as possible. Even without putting it in writing, the meaning of his words was clear: before truly committing itself to Africa, Germany had to defeat the Soviets and secure their oil sources. The fighting on the Eastern Front was developing "in a manner perfectly favorable to our plans" and "our own calamity of oil shortage will soon be eliminated." At the moment, however, it was not yet over, and neither men nor resources could be taken away from it: The current situation is such that, in the eastern arc of the Don, after the refueling and resupplying of our divisions has been completed, a decisive battle will be fought against the Russian units hastily brought there. I do not doubt for a moment that Stalingrad will subsequently fall into our hands. Meanwhile, the divisions of the right wing of the attack are marching towards the Caucasus, fighting continuously and at a breathtaking pace behind the troops of the left wing of Timocenko's army group, which are becoming increasingly disorganized. But all this, Duce, as I have already said, is not only a struggle but above all a problem of movement and therefore of provisions, fuel, and supplies. Nor was the Führer's speech limited to the Eastern Front: the last part of the letter was in fact devoted to the "second front" and the "precautionary measures" that it entailed. It is impossible to say whether Hitler had been informed by von Rintelen or by one of his generals who had daily access to the Supreme Command of what the 'Duce' had written on this subject in the 'Considerations' section, which he had not sent him, and whether he wanted to respond in this way to Mussolini's strategic vision (and its military implications) of the Middle East as a 'second front' where the decisive battle between the Tripartite and its adversaries would be fought, or whether,

on the contrary, with his digression on the "second front," he simply wanted to forestall any Italian requests for aid to be drawn not from the Eastern Front but from occupied Europe. What is certain is that, while stating that he considered "this second front something totally crazy," he nevertheless went into great detail in describing the effort that Germany would have to make to counter a possible Anglo-American attempt to open it, since, as he wrote, "in democracies, decisions are made by the majority and therefore by human incomprehension, one must always count on the possibility that madmen will gain the upper hand there." So, however "crazy" the hypothesis of the "second front" was, it forced him to make another great effort and immobilize resources and men, and even to bring others to the West. With that, the squaring of the circle was achieved: Italy did not have to wait for major aid as long as the fight in the East continued. In essence, in addition to "replacing" the men and materials lost by the Afrika Korps and sending "to a large extent," "to Marshal Rommel, for his German Corps, of offensive armored weapons and anti-tank weapons," Hitler only made the specific commitment to send a division from Crete (where, "just in case," he asked the Italians to send "reinforcements") and a regiment of paratroopers to North Africa. This was rather little for someone who had begun by saying he completely agreed with what Mussolini had written to him and, above all, with what he had written in his "Considerations." We do not know what reactions the letter, immediately sent to him from Rome to Riccione where he had gone to rest (in those very days the symptoms of the amoeba he had contracted in Libya were beginning to appear), provoked in Mussolini. However, they must have been anything but positive. When he returned to Rome two weeks earlier, the "Duce's" state of mind must have been characterized by various feelings. He was angry at the bad impression that Rommel and, above all, Cavallero had made him look bad by going to Libya to claim victory and then having to return empty-handed. He was furious with the military, Ciano noted on July 23, who "for the second time exposed him to the embarrassment of going to the front at an unfortunate time." (He was referring to his trip to Albania). This time, he had ordered Cavallero to telegraph him the word "Tevere" in plain text when he considered the march of our troops to the Canal to be safe. The word "Tevere" arrived on Friday, June 27. The Duce had to delay his departure by two days due to a cyclone that prevented him from flying. Only when he was on site did he realize that things were not going well and that even "Rommel's strategy had its ups and downs." Although Rommel had no direct responsibility for his trip to Libya, a series of other reasons meant that Mussolini was more irritated with him than with Cavallero. According to Ciano, this was because he had "breathed the anti-Rommel air of the Libyan command" and because the marshal "did not even feel the need, for three whole weeks, to visit him" and, again, because of the "derogatory" way in which he had reported the "Sabratha" episode to his superiors in Germany. Added to this was the behavior of the German troops in Libya ("the soldiers' attitude is insolent: German vehicles never give way to anyone, not even our generals, and as soon as there is an opportunity for a little looting, they take everything for themselves"), the glorification of Rommel and the Afrika Korps by German propaganda, which hardly mentioned the Italian troops and, when it did, often did so in ambiguous terms, as if to suggest that if Rommel had not yet won, it was their fault, and, more generally, Berlin's attitude (we have already mentioned this) towards the future occupation

regime in Egypt, it is easy to imagine the state of mind with which Mussolini, who already had many other reasons for controversy and resentment towards the Germans, must have written to Hitler and, above all, must have read his reply. Because, in order to truly understand Mussolini's behavior, one thing must be kept in mind. Despite everything, on his return to Italy, he was confident that the success that had eluded Rommel in those days would still be achieved before long. "He is convinced," Ciano noted on July 21, "that within two or three weeks it will be possible to resume the advance in Egypt and reach the major targets of the Delta and the Canal." However, this conviction was accompanied by two others that are clear from what he wrote in his "Considerations": that victory depended on a "race" between the Axis and the Allies in preparing for the decisive "battle of the Delta" and, therefore, on the ability of Italy and Germany to put Rommel in a position to engage it before the Anglo-Americans were able to bring in enough men and resources to gain the upper hand. From this perspective, it is easy to understand why Mussolini did not consider Rommel's proposal of July 17, 1941, to retreat the front and, in his "Considerations," vigorously emphasized that the sine qua non for the upcoming battle was to "preserve at all costs" the positions that had been reached. It is also understandable that the purpose of his letter to Hitler on July 22 was not so much to "dot the i's" about the episode of the "Sabratha" division, however much it might have burned him, but rather to make the Führer aware of his "Considerations" and thus push him to commit himself to truly supporting the Egyptian front. Finally, it is also understandable why his reactions to Hitler's reply were anything but positive. And it is from this moment that his behavior becomes less clear. Although Hitler's letter left no room for illusions about being able to count on a prompt and substantial German commitment, on August 11, in the Council of Ministers, Mussolini stated in no uncertain terms that "in a few weeks" Rommel would resume the offensive and succeed in "breaking through and reaching the Nile delta." The objectives, he said, were Alexandria, Cairo, but above all Port Said and the Suez Canal, once reached, the Army would enter the Middle East and in a day, perhaps not far off, would be able to join forces with our Alpine troops coming from the Caucasus mountains. Now, he also said, we are sending many reinforcements and large quantities of material to the front, and at this moment we have fifteen divisions in Africa, nine of ours and six German. Even taking into account Mussolini's character and his tendency to often let himself go, especially in certain places and in front of certain "audiences," with bombastic statements that he often later regretted, it is difficult to attribute a purely rhetorical value to these statements or to see them as merely a manifestation of his enthusiasm for the Middle East. The tone and confidence of his speech already raise a big question mark. And they raise it even more forcefully because it appears that in those very days there were differences of opinion between Italian and German military leaders on the conduct of operations and in particular on the timing of the offensive, and that Mussolini was aware of this. While Rommel, under pressure from Berlin and encouraged by von Rintelen, Weininger, and then also by Kesselring, had returned to arguing for the necessity and urgency of resuming the offensive, the Italian side had doubts about this and, above all, wanted more time to organize it better and, given the precarious nature of sea communications, which made regular transport problematic, to prepare greater reserves on site. According to Cavallero's diary, Mussolini initially shared

Cavallero's opinion that the offensive needed to be better organized and even "ordered to slow down a little." Then, suddenly, on August 17, he gave Cavallero, who immediately transmitted them to Rommel, the directives for the advance "to the Delta and then to the Suez Canal." So far, nothing strange, especially since the directives did nothing more than confirm and clarify those given on June 27 by General Bastico, and bringing them out again could have had only hierarchical and political value: to reiterate, against the growing intrusiveness and decision-making autonomy of the Germans, that it was the Italian Supreme Command that made strategic decisions. However, the text of the directives transmitted "by order of the Duce" from Cavallero to Rommel ended with a paragraph that, in essence, left the choice of the start date of the offensive to Rommel and, indeed, urged him not to delay too long: The start date of operations is necessarily subject to the condition that the current program for the transport of supplies, especially fuel, does not suffer any significant delays or disruptions. It is desirable that the action be carried out as soon as possible. I will submit the date you have proposed to the Duce for approval. Nor does it appear that when, at the end of the month, Rommel decided to attack, anything was done to make him postpone the start date of the offensive. On the contrary, on the 26th, when Kesselring, "determined to implement the offensive plan," was leaving to meet with Rommel and went to Cavallero to ask him if he had any "tactical directives to give him for Rommel," the chief of staff simply replied that Rommel "has complete freedom of action in the tactical field." It is not easy to explain Mussolini's behavior. Ciano's diary offers only scant and insignificant clues. The only notes that can be recalled are three: ^i August Mussolini does not comment but is essentially optimistic. j September Mussolini is in a bad mood, does not comment, and has in fact been silent on the subject of Egypt for three days. He is suffering from heartburn again. September 9: He also talks about operations in Libya: the idea of an offensive has now been shelved, at least for a while. He is then indignant with Rommel, who has sent a telegram accusing some of our officers, on the basis of British testimony, of having revealed his plan to the enemy. As for Cavallero's diary, it offers a single element of interest, namely that even after the failure of the offensive, Mussolini still had to consider for some time the possibility that it could be resumed. On September 3, Cavallero replied to Rommel, who had proposed suspending it: "Duce takes note of your decision to suspend the attack. He informs you that supplies will be intensified to enable the Italian-German Army to repel any enemy attack and launch a victorious counterattack. As can be seen, these elements are too scarce to be considered sufficient for a reconstruction of Mussolini's position and behavior. Moreover, as far as a possible resumption of the offensive was concerned, it was not only the "Duce" who was thinking about it. As mentioned, Cavallero was also considering it, so it remains legitimate to ask whether and to what extent Mussolini was influenced in this regard by the position of his chief of staff. All things considered, we therefore believe that at this point the only thing to do is to try to provide a psychological explanation, based, of course, on what we know. This is all the more so because, in our opinion, such an explanation has the merit, so to speak, of constituting a sort of hinge between the realistic and utopian moments that were so strong in Mussolini the man and the politician in recent years, and of not underestimating the moody element of some of his choices and decisions, even important ones. In short, we would say that the

explanation for Mussolini's behavior in July and especially in August 1942 must be found in his twofold conviction 1) that the Mediterranean was of absolute and decisive strategic importance for the Axis; 2) that at that moment it was absolutely necessary to seize the opportunity, before the balance of power shifted irretrievably in favor of the Anglo-Americans, to conquer Egypt, cut the British umbilical cord of the Suez Canal, and set the Middle East and possibly even India ablaze, so as to link the Axis to Japan and bring England to its knees before the United States was able to intervene with all its weight; 3) in his growing resentment and contempt for their "inability" to manage the war against the Germans "politically"; resentment and contempt that were further heightened in him by the humiliation of Italy's growing subordination to Germany, by Berlin's behavior towards Rome and that of the Germans towards the Italians. In this logic, partly rational and partly irrational, Mussolini, at the point where things had reached, could not, even if he had wanted to and there is no reason to believe that he even thought about it, back down. If Rommel and Hitler wanted to resume the offensive, he was certainly not in a position to oppose them, not because he knew full well that his refusal to give his "approval" would not have been enough to stop them, but because, after all he had said and done, it would have amounted to self-disqualification that would have destroyed him in Hitler's eyes, made him the laughing stock of the Germans, and given them the decisive card to finally take command of the Italian armed forces themselves. So, at this point, the only thing left for him to do was to trust in Rommel's victory and, after Rommel had to suspend the attack, continue to argue for the need to remain at El Alamein, hoping that Hitler, having conquered Stalingrad and with operations on the Eastern Front at a standstill, would finally decide to deploy the air forces necessary to "neutralize" Malta and thus face the predictable British counteroffensive in Egypt and then resume the march towards the canal and beyond. No more and no less, therefore, than what Cavallero was also aiming for. The difference, however, was that the responsibility for arguing that it was necessary not to retreat from El Alamein when it was still technically feasible and would have involved far fewer human sacrifices than two months later, however heavy it might have been, was for Cavallero primarily a military one, while for Mussolini it was also and above all a political one and, therefore, much greater, typical of those that fell to a "military leader." We will see later how, even before the British counteroffensive in Egypt at the end of October and the Allied landing in French North Africa in early November, and therefore even before the German defeat at Stalingrad, Mussolini, precisely as a result of the failure of Rommel's offensive at the end of August, had essentially come to the conclusion that unless Hitler accepted his proposal to conclude a compromise peace with Stalin or at least to stabilize the eastern front and transfer the center of gravity of operations to the Mediterranean, the Axis and Italy in particular had now lost the war, and how he tried to maneuver in this situation. In other words, as far as Italy was concerned, the 'long war' was turning into a war that either had to be radically transformed in all its strategic and political aspects or from which a way out had to be found. With all the problems that this obviously entailed, first and foremost that of relations with the Germans. For the moment, at the conclusion of our discussion on "Mussolini as military leader," we would like to focus on two admissions by Mussolini himself that seem to us to complete the picture to some extent. Both are preserved in

Cavallero's diary. The first is connected to the conversation Mussolini had with Rommel at the Rocca delle Caminate on September 24, in the presence of Cavallero himself. On that occasion, Rommel explained the situation in Africa and how he planned to resume the offensive as soon as he had secured thirty days of reserves and two divisions, one German and one Italian, as reinforcements. Rather than agreeing with him on this point, Mussolini replied with a statement that made it clear that there should be no more illusions and that he now understood what he had done wrong: "We have lost the battle at sea; to regain dominance, we must resume pressure on Malta." Even more significant and dramatic is his other admission, made less than a month later, but before the storm at the end of October and beginning of November, with Cavallero explaining the situation to him and, in particular, the increasing difficulties faced by sea transport to North Africa. This is how Cavallero transcribed the central point of the conversation: The Duce expressed himself in these terms: You know, all things considered, I came to the conclusion that instead of advancing on Marsa Matruk, it was better to carry out the operation on Malta. I replied, Duce, I understand that you feel you are faced with a case of conscience. Allow me to ease your mind. Our operation on Malta was prepared for August; the opportunity to march on Egypt arose after the capture of Tobruk in June. The Duce interrupted: 'Yes, I made this decision also following the Führer's news about the collapse of the British 8th Army. I will continue, Duce, we had no choice, both because of the timing, as I have said, and because Rommel had left on his own, saying: "I have orders from the Führer; I hope the Italians will follow me." The Duce replies that if the operation on Malta had been ready at that time, it would certainly have been better to carry out this operation...